



Building trust across the world's divides

Initiatives of Change International

LEARNING FROM THE PAST AND PRESENT

Statement by Dr Omnia Marzouk, President of IofC International,
on behalf of the International Council

Global Assembly, Caux, August 14, 2012

The 24 hours which all 100 of us attending this Global Assembly spent reviewing lessons from the past was a moving and inspiring experience for many of us.

Which of us can remain untouched by the vision, commitment, vocation and sacrifices of those who shared with us on Monday evening – and thousands of others like them who devoted their lives to serve the cause of a better world? The achievements were remarkable, and the history of the twentieth century would have been a more painful one without them. We are all privileged to follow in their steps trying to discern what that vision, commitment and vocation means for us today.

As we walked through our 80+ year history this morning, in the light of what was happening in the world at the same time, we clearly saw how a movement like ours cannot be immune to the times and cultures in which we live and work. Both this morning and this afternoon, some have shared personal insights and learning from specific moments, past and present, that impacted on them during their personal journey.

In our collective history, there clearly were times of profound community and extraordinary heights of selflessness, as this movement for transformation impacted individuals and nations. There have also been times when we have experienced division, dysfunction and distortion.

So our review provided on the one hand awe and celebration at the extraordinary audacity and achievements, but also awareness that the cost of taking on a large task or calling can be considerable.

Behind the public stories sometimes lay hidden, painful ones. Hurts were inflicted, rarely deliberate, but real nonetheless. These were often the transgressions of individuals, but which of us can pass judgment on others, knowing our own frailty.

There was however a further dimension, an organizational culture, which has not been properly understood or acknowledged. As in many institutions, servicing the structure at times was made more important than the growth of the individual. A culture of conformity at times stifled freedom and creativity. Dissenting voices were sometimes suppressed, making learning difficult.

There was over-intrusiveness in people's personal lives. A balance was not struck between the needs of the world and the needs of families and children.

The best of our message and practice, such as inner listening, honest sharing and the four moral standards as guides to our living, has been and still is both liberating and inspired – but also has been and can still be misused out of fear or in the interests of control.

Not all the mistakes are from the distant past. Some of our recent – even current – history contains hurt, pain and divisions that block our team-working and potential.

As President of Initiatives of Change International, and on behalf of the whole International Council, I acknowledge that mistakes were made which in some instances had a profound impact on people's lives. We do not seek to apportion blame. In the same circumstances we might well have made the same mistakes ourselves. And in different circumstances we have made plenty of our own!

Yet our past must be acknowledged if the lessons are to be learned and if the healing we long for is to be found. By acknowledging and learning from the past, we also embrace the present more fully and can shape our future tasks with renewed confidence, passion and commitment.

There may well be people whose stories still need to be heard, whose pain needs to be acknowledged. As part of our commitment to 'start with ourselves', we in the International Council would like to invite such story-telling, and to establish some clear processes for it.

We will also seek to deepen our understanding of why certain things happened, so that key lessons can be identified and applied.

For Initiatives of Change needs to have a commitment to the culture we seek to promote and demonstrate – one of openness to constant learning, changing and care for the individual as well as compassion and generosity towards each other.

We look for new ways of being a 'movement', becoming more of a 'community', which will enable us to address more quickly and carefully the wrongs we are bound to commit while sharing in the joy of the new life that seems to happen in spite of us! We need to work as diligently to build trust across any of our own team divides, as we do to work for, facilitate and promote trust across the world's divides.

Our task continues: to bring to the world, in partnership with others, the hope of personal transformation and an inspiration beyond human capacity alone that impacts on social and global issues. Everyone is needed and we urge that any healing or liberation or fresh insights outstanding may be sought and given in the spirit of acceptance and forgiveness for which our hearts most deeply long. Can each one of us discover deep in our spirits compassion, generosity, forgiveness and grace to move forward together to fulfil our shared mission?

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Omnia Marzouk". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.