

President's Report to the Annual General Meeting, March 29, 2008

Highlights of InterChange's work in 2007

Submitted by Anne Goodman,

InterChange had a busy year in 2007. Much of what we achieved can be found on our website, the messages in the listserv, in the many detailed files and reports posted on Basecamp, our online organizing tool, and in the ongoing connections, relationships and projects that are developing. This report gives some of the highlights.

Infrastructure: Building the Base for the Organization

Most of us got involved in InterChange to do the work that is the mission of InterChange—projects, research, developing newsletters and other communications. Yet to have an effective organization, we need a solid base, and we have discovered that much of our effort in the beginning phase of our organization has had to go in this direction—maybe not the most exciting work we do, but essential. Our achievements in this area include:

- Creating an active international board with representation from Kenya and Croatia.
- Choosing our name—one of the most important things we've done
- Developing mission and vision statements, principles and objectives- we find these are the cornerstones we keep referring back to
- Developing a working definition of Peacebuilding and this is something that we'll expand on as we do our work in the future
- Developing active committees- with committees developing their own terms of reference. Committees have members and leadership from around the world
- We've also opened a bank account and secured an external auditor
- Developing membership guidelines and principles (with a few details left to be decided)
- Developing local centres in Croatia and Kenya.

Communications

Much of our work involves communications—whether it is communicating with the people interested in our work and the general public, or finding ways to have board meetings across long distances. We have developed several tools and methods of communication. These include: our website (with a catchy domain name), Basecamp- an online organizing tool, Skype- a way of having long-distance meetings. One of the most important ways of communicating has been our listserve. Plans are also underway for a newsletter, with the first coming out of Uganda.

Education

We see this as one of the most important future directions for InterChange. The Committee is slowly starting and has recently established a list of interested members. The committee will work on establishing terms of reference and goals. There are several people and/or groups within InterChange working on education projects and the education will work to decide which of these will become and/or lead to InterChange projects. The committee is also hoping to establish at least one joint program.

The Symposium in Rwanda

This was definitely the highlight of the year, especially for those of us who were able to be there. But it infused a great deal of energy into InterChange, even for those who could not attend. It did take a lot of planning, fundraising etc. Detailed reports of the symposium are available on the website and the InterChange notes have been circulated to members and used as the starting point to organize. At the inception of InterChange, we decided there should be regular bi-annual symposia which integrated with our ongoing work, and the symposium in Rwanda underscored for us how important this idea is. InterChange gained immeasurably in terms of relationship-building, developing a common understanding of our organization and shared responsibility, and generating a number of exciting projects.

Highlights of the symposium included:

- Significant media coverage received for the symposium in Rwanda and Uganda
- 55 participants representing Rwanda, other East African countries, Serbia and Canada
- Very successful Open Space process
- Significant commitment to the symposium and InterChange; Many participants stayed for the entire 8 days
- Very important local education days
- Many action items and projects came out of the symposium with people in several areas of the world taking responsibility for them

Projects

These are listed on the website. The symposium gave a great boost to projects. InterChange members around the world have taken ownership of the projects and are involved as coordinators and participants. I see work on projects being a significant direction for the upcoming year. In addition, we're pleased that local projects are developing in Toronto: Diaspora Dialogues and a forum for youth from African countries who are experiencing or have experienced conflict. This will be done in conjunction with other groups and the plan is to hold it in October 2008.

Research Committee

Because so many of the projects involve research, we have incorporated the research committee under the broader projects committee umbrella. Edith Klein will continue to chair this committee and is interested in developing policies and guidelines, and also

finding ways to deal with privacy issues, especially for people whose peacework may put them in a vulnerable position. With Linda Koehler-Moore, Edith led a mini grant writing workshop for the Toronto InterChange members involved in projects. This kind of training will be a valuable resource for other InterChange members.

InterChange visit to the Balkans

Three members of InterChange visited Charles Tauber and the centre in Vukovar in May/June last year. This was an invaluable opportunity to witness the work being done locally and to have discussions on the work of InterChange and how it connected with local work. The group also visited peacebuilding projects in Bosnia and Serbia and made some excellent contacts. One of them, Gordana Saijinovic, attended the Rwanda symposium, but unfortunately several others were not able to be there. We are looking at a possible future project that could bring them to Toronto.

Local Centres

We began the year with 2 regional centres- in Croatia and East Africa. However, at the symposium we decided that “centres” may be more appropriate, since some centres may be located in countries rather than represent regions. It was also discussed that we should build active individual membership and create centres where there is a concentration of members, though we also recognized that having a centre could help build membership. As has been our practice in InterChange, there will likely be an organic process of centre development, and different centres may evolve in different ways. Sometimes people might engage in projects together before building a centre; in other places (e.g. Uganda) people feel ready to develop a centre. Additionally, several people agreed to be local contact people (in Nigeria, Kenya, Uganda and Germany).

One of the issues yet to be decided, highlighted by Charles Tauber of the South East Europe Centre, is how to separate the work of local centres from InterChange, especially when the local centre is an organization. There is much work to be done on this issue. Key work happening in the Balkans (SouthEast Europe centre) includes development of training courses and a future graduate education programme, which could likely be taken up as InterChange work.

We have noted that we appear to be developing a local centre in Toronto, separate from, though linked to the international work of InterChange. This has been helped by the establishment of regular Friday working days, with several people making themselves available. As mentioned earlier, two local projects have developed.