



<http://journal-of-conflictology.uoc.edu>

## PROFILE

---

# Initiatives of Change

Rainer Gude and Chris Breitenberg

### ■ Abstract

Initiatives of Change (IofC) is a worldwide movement of people of diverse cultures and backgrounds who are committed to the transformation of society through change in human motives and behaviour, starting with their own. With many years of experience in peacebuilding, IofC inspires, equips and connects people to address world needs, starting with themselves.

### ■ Keywords

peacebuilding, reconciliation, human security, trustbuilding, ethical leadership, sustainable living

---

## GENERAL DESCRIPTION

Initiatives of Change (IofC) is an NGO with over 80 years of field experience in peacebuilding, reconciliation and the promotion of human security. It has three focus areas for its work: trustbuilding, ethical leadership and sustainable living.

The Founder of IofC, Frank Buchman, once said, “Peace is not just an idea, it is people becoming different.” We believe, and have seen, that people can change. People can be socialized and sensitized to move beyond the pain of war and break the cycles of violence and corruption. Structures remain important and obviously impact on human behavior, however our entry point and medium to change is the human being.

With 31 national associations, and an overarching international association called Initiatives of Change International, IofC utilizes a model that accentuates grassroots work and personal initiative at the local level. It also has special consultative status with ECOSOC at the UN, and promotes its aims through international conferences and projects. Whether at the local or international level, people are at the centre of IofC’s approach as we try to make the link between personal and global change. In that way we reach a wide spectrum of beneficiaries. At our conferences there are both students and ambassadors. Our local projects include programs that range from farmers and women in remote areas to CEOs of large companies.

Our work is founded on a basic approach that focuses on the human dynamic of any lasting change. We uphold a self-reflective approach and values-based living as primary tools in this effort and encourage people to take steps of change in their own lives, dialogue about it with people of diverse backgrounds and circumstances, and finally take action with those people to push forward results in a community or country. With our bottom-up structure, which encourages local ownership, we see our role as one of accompanying, strengthening, and empowering individuals to be the change they want to see in the world.



## MAIN OBJECTIVES

IofC wants to see a just, peaceful and sustainable world to which everyone, responding to the call of conscience, makes their own unique contribution. Our approach is one that encourages people, and our own teams to start with, to listen to others and then to take focused action.

Starting with a self-reflective model, people are invited to take an honest look at their own motives and behaviours and learn to listen to their own conscience. With that as an ongoing practice, they are prepared for a true dialogue with diverse perspectives – a process which is capable of building trust and community. Lastly, our teams accompany others through concrete actions in our three focus areas. Our methods for doing this primarily include training, dialogue facilitation and conferences, as well as various development initiatives. Our local teams are our strength, while our international association provides guidance, cohesion and representation by sharing lessons learned and expertise throughout the network and with partner bodies.

## PARTNERS AND FUNDERS OF THE ORGANIZATION

Locally, IofC has partnered with hundreds of civic society groups and government agencies, and has received funding from individual donors and large grant-making bodies such as the Kellogg Foundation. IofC projects have also been funded by bodies such as the Departments of Foreign Affairs of Switzerland, Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands, and the United States Institute for Peace. Currently, one of our largest partnerships is with the the UN Convention to Combat Desertification.

The domains of peacebuilding, human rights advocacy, development and mediation tend to be widely separated, with highly specialised organisations. Our person-centred approach leads us beyond peacebuilding and indeed has led us to bridge these gaps and also partner with organisations working in other fields. Both our conferences and our grassroots work promote the building of these links. For example, our projects with aboriginal Australians and in inter-racial healing in the United States have led us to form links with human rights advocacy groups, while our work in Burundi together with the Swiss Ministry of Foreign Affairs touched upon more of a mediation role.

## CASE EXEMPLAR

Besides the work of our two conference centres in Caux, Switzerland and Panchgani, India, one of our most well-known grassroots examples is our work in the Great Lakes region of Africa, accompanying individuals, political parties, and armed groups towards dialogue, healing and reconciliation. It largely falls under our trustbuilding work. It was a unique combination of a fruitful partnership with the Swiss government, a great local team with local understanding, ownership and motivation, and the expertise and collaboration of others within the international network of IofC. The work has had some successes along the way, but is far from finished.

Since 2000, IofC, with a local office in Bujumbura, has been working towards peace in Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Rwanda. The goal is not to set up negotiations but to prepare minds and to bring people together so that peace agreements can be signed and political dialogue take place.

Since 2003, the work has focused on Burundi, at the request of Burundians who feared that their country would slip back into chaos. A process of offering support for the main players in the Burundi conflict was set up. Long and ongoing, it largely involves bringing different members of society to talk about their wounds and their fears and to establish bonds of trust between them, based on listening to one another and reflecting about their own responsibilities.

From 2001 to 2007 there were numerous missions on the ground in Bujumbura and Tanzania to meet the leaders from all sides, including the Palipehutu-FNL armed group.



In March 2003, IofC worked for a round-table meeting to bring together representatives from the government, the army, the FRODEBU opposition party, the Catholic Church, the CNDD-FDD, which at that time was a rebel group, and the Palipehutu-FNL. Two CNDD-FDD leaders confided to the organisers that without this round table they would not have managed to assimilate the political process.

In June there was another round table with the goal of changing mind-sets and preparing the way for dialogue. In 2004, this led to a dialogue training given to the Palipehutu-FNL officers. Two years later the government and the Palipehutu-FNL asked IofC to accompany those involved in the Dar es Salaam negotiations, which brought about the ceasefire agreements in June and September 2006.

All this important groundwork, based on building relationships of trust on all sides, led to an 'honest conversation' event in our conference centre in Caux, which brought together 33 political, military, religious and media leaders. This was made possible with the support of the Swiss Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

What followed was a permanent presence of our local team on the ground to support the peacebuilding process. Now the network of people committed to working together with IofC to normalize political life has grown and activities such as personal meetings, Café Politique events, and seminars continue. This has led to other round tables and meetings both in Burundi and in Switzerland as our patient process of trustbuilding and preparation for, and promotion of, dialogue continues.

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

IofC's strengths are very much in its people, which include many volunteers, who are committed to living out IofC's core approach in their own lives and in all IofC operations. Furthermore, IofC's model of locally-owned grassroots-driven initiatives supported by a larger organization keeps us close to significant needs on the ground and flexible to respond to them without major organizational interference. Lastly, we have an 80-year history of success stories in trustbuilding.

The weakness is the counter-balance of the positives that come with this kind of grassroots entrepreneurship model and a long history. Working from the bottom-up can be slow as it is not easy to coordinate and consult with so many local bodies. We are just redeveloping our central organization after years of dispersed work. The longer the history, the harder it is to make adaptations at times.

Nonetheless, the added value of having such local ownership and motivation, as well as such a rich history, is worth the challenge of finding the right structures and balance to best accompany our work. ■

### ■ Recommended citation

GUDE, Rainer; BREITENBERG, Chris (2013). "Initiatives of Change" [online profile]. *Journal of Conflictology*. Vol. 4, Iss. 1, pp. 57-60. Campus for Peace, UOC. [Consulted: dd/mm/yy].

<http://www.uoc.edu/ojs/index.php/journal-of-conflictology/article/view/vol4iss1-gude-breitenberg/vol4iss1-gude-breitenberg>

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.7238/joc.v4i1.1784>

ISSN 2013-8857



The texts published in this journal are – unless indicated otherwise – covered by the Creative Commons Spain Attribution 3.0 licence. You may copy, distribute, transmit and adapt the work, provided you attribute it (authorship, journal name, publisher) in the manner specified by the author(s) or licensor(s). The full text of the licence can be consulted here: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/es/deed.en>.



## ■ Contact details

Initiatives of Change International  
Rainer Gude, Chargé de Mission and Representative to the UN  
1, rue de Varembe  
Genève 1202  
Switzerland  
Tel: +41 22 749 1620  
Fax: +41 22 733 0267  
[www.iofc.org](http://www.iofc.org)



**CAMPUS  
FOR PEACE**

