

# Current Concerns

The international journal for independent thought, ethical standards, moral responsibility, and for the promotion and respect of public international law, human rights and humanitarian law

English Edition of Zeit-Fragen

## Agriculture for the Future

by Prof Dr Hans Hurni, Switzerland



Turning hay near Grindelwald  
(These pictures were part of Prof Hurni's lecture.)

Dear Mr President, dear Walter Haas, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak at the 150th anniversary of the *Lucerne Farmers' Association* (LBV) on a topic that concerns me deeply. I sincerely congratulate you on occasion of this jubilee – less on the proud number of 150 but rather on the fact that with your association you have been supporting farmers' families energetically for 150 years and you will continue to be with them on the difficult road ahead.

The topic of my talk is also the main topic of the IAASTD report [International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development] which has investigated the situation of the global agriculture during a period of over three years and has just published its results in a report of several thousand pages. Only four of the over four hundred participating experts were Swiss; three quarters of them came from developing countries, half of them were women.

The results of the report puzzled many countries, among them the USA, because they contradicted the latter's strategies for their national agriculture. Switzerland signed the report together with 60 other states, mainly because it could contribute to the report

with the centerpiece of Swiss agricultural policy, i.e. the multifunctional role of agriculture and could set an example for global agriculture this way.

The IAASTD report answered 10 questions:

1. Which are the challenges of global agriculture until 2050?
2. What are the pros and cons of biofuel production?
3. Can biotechnology satisfy the increasing demand in food in the best way?
4. How do climate change and agriculture influence each other?
5. How does food production influence health?
6. How can agriculture protect and make use of natural resources?
7. Why were small farmers' families not able to profit more from global trade?
8. How can agriculture benefit from local knowledge?
9. What is the role of women in agriculture?
10. What are the options to act?

All these questions are just as relevant for a family farm in Lucerne as for a large farm in the USA or a small peasant in Ethiopia. And all these are questions which farmers' families cannot solve on their own. To solve them, they need support from their communities, cantons and the federal state or, in other countries, from districts and regions.

It is easy to say that, but not so easy to realize it. Differences in farming worldwide are so immense and not every state has the same resources and possibilities to foster agriculture in the same way. But let us look back to our own region before we turn on global questions.

The picture showing people who are turning hay over was shot in Grindelwald in the 1980s. This is roughly the picture which town people imagine agricultural life to be, or, as *Alois Hodel* said in the jubilee journal of 1984, 25 years ago: In grandfather's days, a farmer's work was a "noiseless steady work for life." Of course, it still happens that small meadows of family farms are mown by hand. But this is a rare exception. The structural change in agriculture, which started in 1859 with the founding of the LBV was immense. And it has not ended yet.

The idea that Swiss agriculture is a highly traditional and little innovative economic activity is entirely wrong. There is no other 150-year-old enterprise that had to meet such

great challenges and had to adapt so continuously as agriculture had to do and still does with great success.

In 1850, some 50% of all employees were employed in agriculture. By 1910, this number had dropped to half. This, however, does not imply that the number of farmers was reduced by the same number because during the same period, the population had grown substantially and the number of employed persons with it. It was not until the 1960s that many people moved away from agriculture.

With great interest, I read the LBV jubilee journal of 1984, including the historical review by *Felici Berther*. He described the change from "bread and pap" to "milk and meat" (that was around 1850), from cheap

imports to more state protection and support (from 1890 on), from boom to migration (from 1950 on) and from subsidies for agricultural products to direct payments (from 1990 on). But you know this better than I do. What is certain is the enormous change that has taken place in each generation since 1850. And we can certainly assume that also in the future, change and pressure to adapt will remain great.

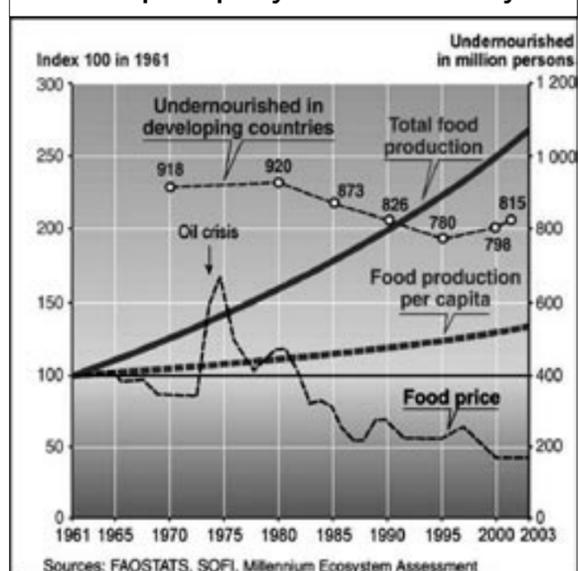
Our agriculture can well be described with the picture of modern grain production, below (see picture 2). The uniform stretch of land, the mechanized field work, the single person doing the work, the high yield per area and the sinking prices – in terms of purchasing power – earned by this kind of work.

From a global point of view, the agriculture of the last 150 years was a success story.

The world population is now 6.7 billion people. There were only 2.5 billion in 1950. The arable land per person has shrunk accordingly. Now it is no more than 0.2 hectare (2,000 square meters). And what will the situation be like when the world population will amount to 9 billion in 2050? Will the global agriculture be able to provide food for the world population in 2050?

In the past 50 years since 1961, agriculture was able to produce enough food, animal

### More per capita yield for less money



Sources: FAOSTATS, SOFI, Millennium Ecosystem Assessment

food, wood and fibers, even if the distribution was not just and many poor remained undersupplied. The total agricultural production could be more than doubled. In spite of an increase in population, the per capita harvest increased. However, the number of underfed stayed roughly the same and prices dropped to 50% of the prices of 1960.

The main reason for the drop in prices was the enormous increase in productivity both per area and per working person, due to the mechanization and cheap fossil fuel. Mechanized farms could produce enormous crops on large areas with high productivity per area while smaller farms with more manual work remained clearly disadvantaged. The great differences between developing countries and industrialized countries can be traced to the fact that in the developing countries the farmers are still the majority, just like in Switzerland 150 years ago.

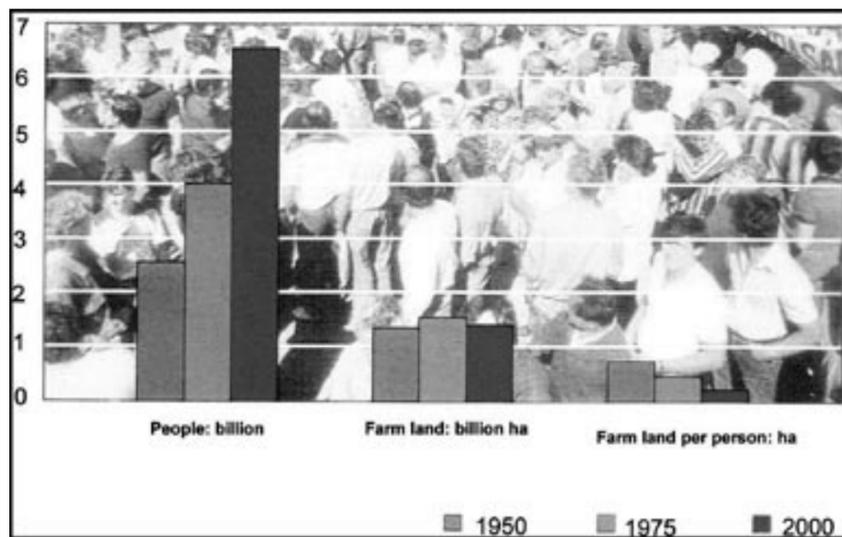
Of the 6.7 billion people, about 2.7 billion worldwide still work in agriculture. This is roughly 40%. The vast majority are very small farmers with about one hectare arable land per family. Their production serves mainly to feed the family itself. This means that there is not much surplus and the families do not have the money to buy production

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Modern wheat production. (picture zvg)

### Global agriculture – a success story in spite of shrinking arable land



Global arable land (chart: World Agriculture Report)

### "Agriculture for the Future"

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means. 70% of the almost 900 million poor are small farmers.

The mechanized enterprises, by whose production particularly the cities are nourished, however, employ only about 20 million people. Among them are the majority of Swiss farmers, because mechanization has made progress here as well.

Globalized farming puts small farmers under enormous pressure. Their areas of land are too small, their income too little, their children too many, and their environment destroyed for reasons of poverty. That is the biggest challenge for agriculture and also of the world's development in future.

The following pictures\* originate from the National Centre of Competence in Research (NCCR) North South. This is a union of Swiss institutions under the leadership of the University of Berne, which my colleagues and I have established since 2001 and since then connected it with 140 institutions worldwide.

Approximately 400 persons work in this centre, operating research for the management of global changes. I will show you seven specific examples of small farming enterprises around the world now.

In 1993, our astronaut *Claude Nicollier* took photos of the east coast of Madagascar shot from the space shuttle. Very excitedly, he phoned the Federal Councillor *Ruth Dreifuss* and said: "I see the rain forest burn." He was not right, however.

What he saw burning was not the forest; it was weeds, a shrub fallow, which the farmers must burn on their fields in order to be able to cultivate the ground at all. No hill rice would grow otherwise. However, *Claude Nicollier* was right in a certain sense, as the farmers in Madagascar really burn their rain forest. They do what the *Alemanni* did in Switzerland 1500 years ago, when they cleared a lot of woodland in order to gain farmland.

Agriculture in Ethiopia is even older. In the course of 5000 years, the whole forest in the high country was cleared. Farmers still plow steepest slopes (see picture below) as they do in the Swiss *Emmental*; the erosive power of the rain is 10 times stronger than in Switzerland, however.

As a consequence of centuries of agriculture, the soils are profoundly damaged. As sufficient land reserves were available 100 years ago, nobody cared about soil conservation.

It was with international assistance, also granted by Switzerland among others, that terracing was introduced 35 years ago. Today approximately 20% of the highland surface is preserved. Thus, there is still a lot to do for the coming generations.

At Mount Kenya, there is a similar situation. Big landowners, above all white colonialist and later rich Kenyans, cultivated wheat on large surfaces. Apart from that, many small farmers have bought the land

from their former masters during the last 30 years.

Their number grows rapidly, because they have many children. Moreover, the country is dry so that they cannot count on a grain yield each year. The people did not know that when they bought the land and moved there. The supply is low accordingly, so that relief aid is very often necessary.

In our projects in the Pamir Mountains in Central Asia, agriculture is at its limits. Rainfall amounts to hardly 100 liters per square meter per year, so that the farmers are dependent on irrigation from the snow and glacier melt. Glaciers, however, will no longer exist for a very long time. In 100 years' time, most of them will have melted away. For many of the farmers it will mean the end of their existence.

The picture from Eastern Tibet (see picture on the top right) is interesting, because

like in Switzerland the tradition was a skillful local planning: All the houses are built on steep slopes, because slopes are less important for farming than the flat rice fields in the valleys. This tradition, however, was broken, as the cities spread on the best land, just like in our own country

The tremendous variety of rural life is also visible in Laos. The river as transportation route and fishing grounds; next to it rice fields and special cultures on hills, like for example caoutchouc plantations for natural rubber or hill rice and sometimes even opium in remote areas, because there is a lucrative sales market for opium and the farmers are forced to seize this opportunity from sheer poverty.

It is perhaps worth mentioning that irrigation surfaces let out a lot of methane gas, a very harmful greenhouse gas increasing the global warming.

Terracing on steep slopes (see picture on the right) is a new investment in the protection against ground erosion for the small farming families in the Bolivian Highlands. It actually causes an enormous additional work, for which they must get compensation, similar to certain direct payments in Switzerland. Unfortunately, the Bolivian state does not have any money for such investments; therefore, there are only a few development projects, which grant support. Unfortunately, there is a huge number of problems in global agriculture, both with the modern as well as with traditional agriculture.

For example, greenhouse gases are responsible for climate change, but not only the exhaust fumes but also those from the irrigation fields and finally also the smoke clouds from the land clearance by fire. Altogether



Local planning in Eastern Tibet. (picture zvg)

er approximately a quarter of all greenhouse gases originate from agriculture.

Furthermore, agriculture produces sufficient supplies to nourish mankind today and probably in the future, but the distribution is still most unfair. Many developing countries do not have sufficient spending power for the import of food.

The incentives to increase grain production are not very big. Considering the purchasing power, grain prices have dropped to half in the last 100 years. Only if the oil price was

er the country wants to get involved or not. On an international level, however, the pressure is high.

Agriculture creating future. Globally, we talk about nourishing 9 billion people and if their demands might increase. Furthermore agriculture has to cope with climate change, deal with the resources effectively, use water economically, meet other requirements such as bio energy and landscape preservation and in the long run, but most importantly, enable the farmers' families and rural communities



Terrace construction in Bolivia. (picture zvg)

high, these prices rose at short notice; this happened last in 1973 and last year.

Agriculture was and is submitted to constant change. Eating habits caused a change in demand, and the farmers usually complied very fast. The Lucerne region is the best example. However, not all regions were equally flexible.

What we do not know yet is the effect of climate change. Rising temperatures, changed precipitation and the number of extreme events will increase. How should agriculture protect itself from them? It may end in a disaster, if the best irrigation fields are on sea level, for example, in the countries of Southeast Asia. The sea level rising only a few centimeters – as is already measured today in some places – can cause tropical cyclones to advance into the heart of the country. And what will happen if the sea level will have risen about half a meter?

Production of bio energy has become a political issue. While wood and muscle power as traditional bio-energies have always been at the heart of small-scale farming and, seen from a global point of view, are still the most important energy sources in agriculture, new regulations for the promotion of bio fuels mean a danger to the production of food.

Many states set high hopes on biotechnology by means of genetic engineering, while others vehemently oppose this new method of planting and animal breeding. It takes the people's free will here to determine wheth-

to live. This can only be reconciled, if agriculture operates multi-functionally. Agriculture is and remains oriented towards productivity. Food for all is at the center of rural activity. It must remain economically feasible. Agriculture must be operated in a socially compatible and acceptable way. Agriculture must be environment-friendly and contribute to the improvement of both the environment and the climate. This is a model for the future.

Multi-functional agriculture was developed in Switzerland and has spread for some years in Europe, too. Multi-functional agriculture as a concept was included by the World Agriculture Report and accepted by the developing countries after numerous discussions. These countries initially thought that it was a concept from the north, which should be forced on them. However, they quickly realized the advantages resulting from it.

This alone does not guarantee a good rural future in Switzerland and worldwide for a long time. General economic and political conditions force agricultural policies to constantly adapt to the global development.

Agriculture has coped well with the storms of the last 150 years. I am convinced that it will do so in the next 150 years, as well. •

\* Slightly abridged lecture on the occasion of "150 Jahre Luzerner Bäuerinnen- und Bauernverband LBV" on 27 February 2009 in Sempach



Peasant in An Jeni, ploughing (picture Martin Moll)

# Wall Street Helped Greece to Mask Debt Fueling Europe's Crisis

by Louise Story, Landon Thomas jr. and Nelson D. Schwartz

Wall Street tactics akin to the ones that fostered subprime mortgages in America have worsened the financial crisis shaking Greece and undermining the euro by enabling European governments to hide their mounting debts.

As worries over Greece rattle world markets, records and interviews show that with Wall Street's help, the nation engaged in a decade-long effort to skirt European debt limits. One deal created by Goldman Sachs helped obscure billions in debt from the budget overseers in Brussels.

Even as the crisis was nearing the flashpoint, banks were searching for ways to help Greece forestall the day of reckoning. In early November — three months before Athens became the epicenter of global financial anxiety — a team from Goldman Sachs arrived in the ancient city with a very modern proposition for a government struggling to pay its bills, according to two people who were briefed on the meeting.

The bankers, led by Goldman's president, Gary D. Cohn, held out a financing instrument that would have pushed debt from Greece's health care system far into the future, much as when strapped homeowners take out second mortgages to pay off their credit cards.

It had worked before. In 2001, just after Greece was admitted to Europe's monetary union, Goldman helped the government quietly borrow billions, people familiar with the transaction said. That deal, hidden from public view because it was treated as a currency trade rather than a loan, helped Athens to meet Europe's deficit rules while continuing to spend beyond its means.

Athens did not pursue the latest Goldman proposal, but with Greece groaning under the weight of its debts and with its richer neighbors vowing to come to its aid, the deals over the last decade are raising questions about Wall Street's role in the world's latest financial drama.

As in the American subprime crisis and the implosion of the American International Group, financial derivatives played a role in the run-up of Greek debt. Instruments developed by Goldman Sachs, JPMorgan Chase and a wide range of other banks enabled politicians to mask additional borrowing in Greece, Italy and possibly elsewhere.

In dozens of deals across the Continent, banks provided cash upfront in return for government payments in the future, with those liabilities then left off the books. Greece, for

example, traded away the rights to airport fees and lottery proceeds in years to come.

Critics say that such deals, because they are not recorded as loans, mislead investors and regulators about the depth of a country's liabilities.

Some of the Greek deals were named after figures in Greek mythology. One of them, for instance, was called Aeolos, after the god of the winds.

The crisis in Greece poses the most significant challenge yet to Europe's common currency, the euro, and the Continent's goal of economic unity. The country is, in the argot of banking, too big to be allowed to fail. Greece owes the world \$300 billion, and major banks are on the hook for much of that debt. A default would reverberate around the globe.

A spokeswoman for the Greek finance ministry said the government had met with many banks in recent months and had not committed to any bank's offers. All debt financings "are conducted in an effort of transparency," she said. Goldman and JPMorgan declined to comment.

While Wall Street's handiwork in Europe has received little attention on this side of the Atlantic, it has been sharply criticized in Greece and in magazines like *Der Spiegel* in Germany.

"Politicians want to pass the ball forward, and if a banker can show them a way to pass a problem to the future, they will fall for it," said Gikas A. Hardouvelis, an economist and former government official who helped write a recent report on Greece's accounting policies.

Wall Street did not create Europe's debt problem. But bankers enabled Greece and others to borrow beyond their means, in deals that were perfectly legal. Few rules govern how nations can borrow the money they need for expenses like the military and health care. The market for sovereign debt — the Wall Street term for loans to governments — is as unfettered as it is vast.

"If a government wants to cheat, it can cheat," said Garry Schinasi, a veteran of the International Monetary Fund's capital markets surveillance unit, which monitors vulnerability in global capital markets.

Banks eagerly exploited what was, for them, a highly lucrative symbiosis with freespending governments. While Greece did not take advantage of Goldman's proposal in November 2009, it had paid the bank about \$300 million in fees for arranging the 2001 transaction, according to several bankers familiar with the deal.

Such derivatives, which are not openly documented or disclosed, add to the uncertainty over how deep the troubles go in Greece and which other governments might have used similar off-balance sheet accounting.

The tide of fear is now washing over other economically troubled countries on the periphery of Europe, making it more expensive for Italy, Spain and Portugal to borrow.

For all the benefits of uniting Europe with one currency, the birth of the euro came with an original sin: countries like Italy and Greece entered the monetary union with bigger deficits than the ones permitted under the treaty that created the currency. Rather than raise taxes or reduce spending, however, these governments artificially reduced their deficits with derivatives.

Derivatives do not have to be sinister. The 2001 transaction involved a type of derivative known as a swap. One such instrument, called an interest-rate swap, can help companies and countries cope with swings in their borrowing costs by exchanging fixed-rate payments for floating-rate ones, or vice versa. Another kind, a currency swap, can minimize the impact of volatile foreign exchange rates.

But with the help of JPMorgan, Italy was able to do more than that. Despite persistently high deficits, a 1996 derivative helped bring Italy's budget into line by swapping currency with JPMorgan at a favorable exchange rate, effectively putting more money in the government's hands. In return, Italy committed to future payments that were not booked as liabilities.

"Derivatives are a very useful instrument," said Gustavo Piga, an economics professor who wrote a report for the Council on Foreign Relations on the Italian transaction. "They just become bad if they're used to window-dress accounts."

In Greece, the financial wizardry went even further. In what amounted to a garage sale on a national scale, Greek officials essentially mortgaged the country's airports and highways to raise much-needed money.

Aeolos, a legal entity created in 2001, helped Greece reduce the debt on its balance sheet that year. As part of the deal, Greece got cash upfront in return for pledging future landing fees at the country's airports. A similar deal in 2000 called Ariadne devoured the revenue that the government collected from its national lottery. Greece, however, classified those transactions as sales, not loans, despite doubts by many critics.

These kinds of deals have been controversial within government circles for years. As far back as 2000, European finance ministers fiercely debated whether derivative deals used for creative accounting should be disclosed.

The answer was no. But in 2002, accounting disclosure was required for many entities like Aeolos and Ariadne that did not appear on nations' balance sheets, prompting governments to restate such deals as loans rather than sales.

Still, as recently as 2008, Eurostat, the European Union's statistics agency, reported that "in a number of instances, the observed securitization operations seem to have been purportedly designed to achieve a given accounting result, irrespective of the economic merit of the operation."

While such accounting gimmicks may be beneficial in the short run, over time they can prove disastrous.

George Alogoskoufis, who became Greece's finance minister in a political party shift after the Goldman deal, criticized the transaction in the Parliament in 2005. The deal, Mr. Alogoskoufis argued, would saddle the government with big payments to Goldman until 2019.

Mr. Alogoskoufis, who stepped down a year ago, said in an e-mail message last week that Goldman later agreed to reconfigure the deal "to restore its good will with the republic." He said the new design was better for Greece than the old one.

In 2005, Goldman sold the interest rate swap to the National Bank of Greece, the country's largest bank, according to two people briefed on the transaction.

In 2008, Goldman helped the bank put the swap into a legal entity called Titlos. But the bank retained the bonds that Titlos issued, according to Dealogic, a financial research firm, for use as collateral to borrow even more from the European Central Bank.

Edward Manchester, a senior vice president at the Moody's credit rating agency, said the deal would ultimately be a money-loser for Greece because of its long-term payment obligations.

Referring to the Titlos swap with the government of Greece, he said: "This swap is always going to be unprofitable for the Greek government." •

Source: *International Herald Tribune*, 14 February 2010

## Soil Improvement by Circular Economy

thk. One important aspect of the World Agriculture Report is soil cultivation. In the 50s, 60s and 70s of the last century there were higher yields due to the use of artificial fertilizer, but towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, voices became louder cautioning against the unrestrained use of chemicals on our fields and meadows. Several years ago Swiss farmers started with Integrated Crop production (IP) on large areas. The growing application of artificial fertiliser has leached out the soil and fostered erosion. The gap between sustainability and profitability became wider, and the agricultural free trade à la WTO fostered this unhealthy development worldwide.

There is one branch of industry which profits from this development enormously: the agricultural chemistry has earned billions worldwide. There are always new substances that are supposed to bring new richness to leached soil in order to conceal long-term destruction of the soil because of chemicals and industrial cultivation methods.

The agricultural multinationals want to deal with the problem of increasing pests, which are due to unnatural varieties and mono-cultural farming as well as the destruction of soil richness by employing genetic engineering, which damages a plant's natural

power of resistance. The consequences are devastating, and thus solutions suggested by the World Agriculture Report have to be realized urgently.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> *Berner Bodenbericht 2009* (Bernese report on soil) confirms the claims of the World Agriculture Report. In the summary of the *Bodenbericht* we read: "Today's intensive agriculture has to increase its production continuously, which leads to a growing expenditure of energy. Worldwide we can ascertain devastating effects on the basis of life." Basically we know about the causes and effects of intensive agriculture. We can read in the *Bodenbericht*: "Muddy and eroded soil, standing water and deep lanes on a field or in the forest, submergence of ground due to removal of humus soil as well as distinct plough soles are signs for the fact that soil is compressed through improper ploughing as well as frequent usage of heavy machinery, often in combination with unfavourable soil condition."

However, what choice does a farmer have, who has to compete with world market prices, who can cultivate only a restricted area, but who has to produce cheaper and cheaper? Just this question shows the absurdity of a worldwide agriculture free trade, which does not serve the people but mainly flushes prof-

its into the pockets of agricultural multinationals. But in spite of, or maybe just because of worldwide competition and struggle for survival within agriculture, there are always some prudent people who draw their conclusions from their own experience and who already work in accordance with the World Agriculture Report.

A number of like-minded people have united in *Verora GmbH (Verora Ltd)* based in Edlibach in the mountain area of Zug, Central Switzerland. The name *Verora* stands for the purpose of this association: farmers from Zug produce humus compost from green waste. Their approach is revolutionary as it is opposed to agricultural chemistry and does almost without any chemistry; on the other hand it is conservative as it draws on agricultural traditions: the objective is to create a closed circle that can do without chemical additives.

The secret lies in the utilization of green waste. "High-quality humus compost improves soil richness significantly, and at the same time reduces greenhouse emissions", says the director of *Verora Ltd., Alfred Abächerli*.

He and his colleagues have been working on the issue of natural agriculture for many years, and they realized the importance of

a reasonable utilization and usage of green waste. They were inspired by soil researchers *Siegfried and Uta Lübke* and *Angelika and Urs Hildebrandt-Lübke* from Upper Austria, who have carried out various scientific tests and many years of research in the field of soil usage and improvement. One outcome of their research is that they renounce the usage of artificial fertiliser and liquid manure, and are therefore opposed to the agricultural industry.

The aim of their research is to improve quality and richness of soil used by farmers so that there is more yield, produced in a more healthy way. The differentiated spread of farmer's fertilizer – dung and slurry – is the base for healthy soil. The theory behind the practice, which has to be explained in more detail another time, is convincing and success proves Abächerli right. Farmers who acquired knowledge about correct soil cultivation and put them into practice, confirm better soil quality as well as higher and healthier yields.

The shortcomings presented in the *Berner Bodenbericht* could be, according to Abächerli, "resolved in a sustainable way by employing correct composting of green waste and farmer's waste combined with considerate soil cultivation." •

# War Drums and Cabinet Politics

## What did the German and the Israeli governments agree upon in Berlin?

by Karl Müller, Germany

In his book "One Palestine, Complete: Jews and Arabs Under the British Mandate" (2001, ISBN 978-0349112862) Israeli historian *Tom Segev* stated that during World War I, the British government had given way to the Zionist movement and in particular its outstanding personality *Chaim Weizmann*, who later became the first president of Israel, in nearly all issues concerning Palestine. Segev did not do so by conviction, but believing in an alleged "worldwide influence" of the Jews, which they would use "to affect the outcome of the world war." Tom Segev said that the British were only concerned about having the Zionist movement on their side in war. The rights of the population in Palestine, which are Arabs in a large majority, went unheeded in this situation.

In their book "The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy" (reprinted in 2008, ISBN 978-0374531508), the US-American political scientists, *John J. Mearsheimer* and *Stephen M. Walt*, tried to point out that the US-American foreign policy of the past years and its unconditioned support of Israel's policy is neither justified by the great strategic importance of Israel for the USA nor by any moral reasons. It is however attributed to the political power of the US-American Israel lobby.

### Why do they unconditionally support Israel?

In today's Germany, it is said that the unconditional German support for the policy of Israel is an indisputable result of the German responsibility for the murder of 6 million Jews in World War II and the National Socialist rule in Germany.

This argument, however, has clay feet, and is also disputed among Jews. Let us refer to books like "The Holocaust Industry: Reflections on the Exploitation of Jewish Suffering" by *Norman G. Finkelstein* (Verso, 2003, ISBN 978-1859844885), or *Avraham Burg* "The Holocaust Is Over; We Must Rise from Its Ashes" (Palgrave Macmillan 2008, ISBN 978-0230607521).

Even on the occasion of the day of remembrance on 27 January, when the present President of Israel, *Simon Peres*, delivered a speech in the German Bundestag, there was another Jewish commemoration, whose appeal reads as follows. "Religious Jews – survivors and victims of the Holocaust – represent their view of history for the first time since the foundation of the Federal Republic of Germany. They point to the fact that the leaders of the Zionist state have no right to abuse the Jewish victims of World War II for their suppression of the Palestinian people – particularly as this people certainly does not have any responsibility for the crimes of the Hitler regime." So why does today's German political leadership support the policy of Israel so unconditionally?

### Why support the disregard of international law and human rights?

This question is all the more important, the clearer it becomes – and this is also well-known to the German political leadership –

### One can learn from history!

"What began as calculation of reason ended in the blood quagmire of an industrial mass war, senseless in itself and radically denying all sense in past and future culture.

Did not the governments – each for itself – carefully act according to insights and reasons of state, consider the options, calculate the risks, give preference to smaller evils, estimate smaller against bigger dangers – and was not the result a disaster, nevertheless?"

The historian *Michael Stürmer* on the insanity of "war plans" before World War I, in: "Das ruhelose Reich. Deutschland 1866 – 1918", 1994, p. 372 ISBN 3-88680-500-X

that this support is granted to a policy, which has ignored international law, humanitarian international law and the human rights for decades. Germany, however, has committed itself to these laws in its constitution. This support is also meant for a policy, which has caused wars with devastating consequences directly or indirectly throughout the past years: the war against Iraq in 2003 (see *Stephen J. Sniegoski*: "The Transparent Cabal. The Neoconservative Agenda, War in the Middle East, and the National Interest of Israel", 2008, ISBN 978-1-932528-17-6) or the war against Lebanon in 2006, and the permanent war against the Palestinian people. And now the Israeli policy pushes even more substantially towards a war against Iran.

### Angela Merkel's role

Nevertheless, the German governments have tied themselves to the policy of Israel in the past years; even more closely so since *Angela Merkel* was elected German Federal Chancellor – a fact that has also met with international attention (see *Judy Dempsey*: "Embracing Israel Costs Merkel Clout"; in: "The International Herald Tribune" of 20 January). Meanwhile this is considered to be an obstacle on the way to a constructive role of the European Union in Middle East.

Even in 2005, *Angela Merkel* tried to make the alliance with Israel a German reason of state. Since then, she has continued to develop this political line and has also made it the official government line. The coalition agreement of the new government does not only say that the government concedes "Germany's special responsibility towards Israel" but also stands by "Israel as a Jewish State" (page 113 of the coalition agreement). It says so although approximately 20 per cent of the Israeli population is Arab and nearly 5 per cent of the population is neither Arab nor Jewish, even today. But the word "Jewish state" is also the phraseology of the Israeli Minister of Foreign Affairs, *Avigdor Lieberman*, and the current Israeli government.

### Merkel speaks of sanctions without a Security Council resolution ...

In January, German-Israeli government consultations and a visit to Germany by the Israeli President have again attracted attention on the German-Israeli relations.

The objective of both meetings became obvious when *Angela Merkel* and *Benjamin Netanyahu* held a press conference on 18 January. Merkel not only made some general remarks on the objective, "to cooperate closely in foreign and security matters", but also commented on Iran as follows: "We have made it clear that if the reaction of Iran does not change, we will cooperate in the preparation of wide-ranging sanctions [...] preferably within the framework of a UN Security Council resolution. Preparations will be made in the weeks to come." Then the German Chancellor added, "But Germany will take part in sanctions with other countries that are pursuing the same goal."

### ... but with war drums from Israel

At the press conference, the Israeli Prime Minister could beat the war drums without facing any opposition using a doubtful historical comparison: "The second point is the question of Iran. The true face of this regime has been unmasked in the year that's just passed. It's a regime that tyrannizes its own people. And we know from recent history that a regime that tyrannizes its own people will tyrannize the world. [...] I think the first half of the 21st century will be marked by the way the international community acts on these questions."

The Israeli President raised the ante when in his speech before the German Bundestag under the heading "never again!" he proclaimed, "Never again ignore blood-thirsty dictators, hiding behind demagogical masks, who utter murderous slogans. [...] My Friends, the leaders of the German people and its representatives, [...] The threats to annihilate a people and a nation [which no Iranian government has voiced, *author's note*] are voiced in the shadow of weapons of mass-destruction [whose existence has been claimed without proof, *author's note*], which are held by irresponsible hands, by irrational thinking and in an untruthful language."

### Are there any secret agreements between Germany and Israel?

Therefore, the question is justified, what the two governments – the German and the Israeli governments – negotiated and decided upon in this context.

Was it only about "further development of the cultural relations", "common projects on water supply in developing countries" and "to step up the co-operation between German and Israeli medium-sized businesses"? This is how the press release of 18 January reads.

Or did they make secret agreements concerning Iran beyond the democratic public? The question arises whether it

is not very unusual that two complete governments meet. The meeting of the German and the Israeli governments was the first on German ground – after a visit of the German government in Israel two years ago.

Do two complete governments have to meet, in order to talk about cultural relations, water supply and co-operation of the medium-sized businesses?

Two newspaper articles, which were published a few days later, confirm the necessity to inquire critically. On 25 January, the "Junge Welt" reported on a new study of the US-American Heritage Foundation. The ten-page paper was published on 15 January and can be read at [www.heritage.org/Research/MiddleEast/bg2361.cfm](http://www.heritage.org/Research/MiddleEast/bg2361.cfm). There we learn that the US Government is to recognize the Israeli "right" to take action "in self-defense" against Iran. The USA would have to prepare for a violent Iranian response to an Israeli preventive strike, including preparations for a possible US war with Iran because "Given that the United States is likely to be attacked by Iran in the aftermath of an Israeli strike anyway, it may be logical to consider joining Israel in a preventive war against Iran."

That Washington correspondent of the newspaper "Die Welt" beat the war drums likewise on 25 January: The current statements of the German government on Afghanistan and on Iran were an "expression of the psychological preparation on a possibly violent conflict in the Persian Gulf, in which Germany may stand apart last of all, due to its history". The article conjures up a war scenario and finishes by saying that "Angela Merkel prepares Germany for co-defending Israel."

### Secret diplomacy before World War I led to the war

More than 90 years ago, in the years and decades before World War I – when the people in most states of Europe were still treated like subjects and the governments consisted of a ruling elite behaving like absolutists – it was common practice to prepare wars by cabinet politics and secret diplomacy. The then German government of the Reich did so, too: In the summer of 1914 "July crisis", secret agreements between the German government and the Habsburg monarchy prevented the war to

be averted. Both governments thought they were acting particularly intelligently and with careful consideration.

But it ended up in a world war with millions of victims, a world war, which changed Europe and the world irrevocably and radically.

The first point of US President *Woodrow Wilson*'s "Fourteen Points" for a world after the war reads as follows, "Open covenants of peace, openly arrived at, after which there shall be no private international understandings of any kind but diplomacy shall proceed always frankly and in the public view."

Today the UN plans the registration of all international agreements. If they are not registered, they will not be recognized by the UN and by the *International Court of Justice*.

Nevertheless, secret diplomacy has never been terminated during the past 90 years. This was not for the benefit of mankind.

While the Israeli government refuses to let the Minister of Development of the German EU partner country Belgium enter the blocked Gaza Strip and while he vigorously – and rightfully – protests against this practice, the German government fiddles with the government of Israel on "plans for the future". How long will the world, will Europe, will the Germans acquiesce in this behavior?

### Demands on Angela Merkel

*Angela Merkel*'s Middle East policy is already – together with others – responsible for the fact that there is no peace but that there are countless victims in the Middle East. She participated in preventing that Israel's war against Lebanon ended quickly. Thus, each day the war continued more innocent people lost their lives. She granted cover for the Israeli government's war crimes when they attacked the Gaza Strip at the end of 2008 and the beginning of 2009.

How many more victims among the Palestine population will the German Middle East policy accept before those responsible for it come to their senses? Who in Germany wants to take responsibility for the fact that German weapons systems, for example German submarines, may participate in causing dreadful misery by a new war in the Middle East?

It is high time to demand that all German agreements with Israel be published! Germany's politics must abide by international law, by the humanitarian international law and by the human rights. No more weapon supplies to Israel! Germany must not take part in a new war!

## Current Concerns

The international journal for independent thought, ethical standards, moral responsibility, and for the promotion and respect of public international law, human rights and humanitarian law

Publisher: Zeit-Fragen Cooperative

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Subscription details:

published regularly

annual subscription rates: SFr. 72. –

€ 45. – / £ 28. – / \$ 66. – (incl. postage and VAT)

Account: Postscheck-Konto: PC 87-644472-4

Printers: Druckerei Nüssli, Mellingen, Switzerland

The editors reserve the right to shorten letters to the editor. Letters to the editor do not necessarily reflect the views and opinions of *Current Concerns*.

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*Current Concerns* is an independent journal produced by volunteers that is not supported by advertising. Any financial contribution is greatly appreciated.

## Embracing Israel Costs Merkel Clout

by Judy Dempsey

There are some foreign policy issues that *Angela Merkel* does not like to talk about. One is Afghanistan. The other is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. So when she was asked about Israel's settlement policy and the blockade of Gaza during a joint news conference here Monday with the Israeli Prime Minister, *Benjamin Netanyahu*, she minimized the issue. It was time to restart the peace process, she said, moving quickly to another topic.

German leaders find it very difficult to criticize Israel because of the responsibility Germany bears for the Holocaust and their commitment to the existence of the state of Israel. This is true of Mrs Merkel in particular, who wants to forge a much closer relationship with Israel. The chancellor's position has made it even more difficult for the European Union to speak with one voice on the Middle East.

But Mrs Merkel's policy is inconsistent. When she was first elected chancellor in late 2005, she placed much emphasis on human rights and freedom. She criticized China's human rights policy and made the highly controversial decision to meet the Dalai Lama, the exiled Tibetan spiritual leader, in the Chancellery in 2007. China warned of dire consequences, such as severing lucrative trade contracts. Aside from the cancellation of a few high-level meetings, little happened.

When Mrs Merkel met nongovernmental organizations that *Vladimir V. Putin* had tried to ban, the relationship between Berlin and Moscow became frosty. That was all.

But as far as the Middle East is concerned, Mrs Merkel has paid scant attention to the miserable living conditions of Palestinians in Gaza as well as Israel's settlements and de-

pendence on France and Germany cooperating, it has gone nowhere. Mrs Merkel and the French President, *Nicolas Sarkozy*, have proposed no new initiatives that would make Europe more coherent and credible as a global player. Mrs Merkel has also often put German interests before Europe's.

The only success is Israel. "Mrs Merkel has an emotional relationship with Israel and the Jewish people," Mr Langguth said. Mrs Merkel has embarked on her own particular policy toward Israel, pursuing a special relationship even after the Gaza bombings. Against the advice of German diplomats, Mrs Merkel, who is also leader of the conservative Christian Democratic Union party, which is a staunch defender of Israel, referred to Israel as a "Jewish state" in the government's coalition agreement with the Free Democrats last October. Israelis were delighted. "It is our policy that other states recognize Israel as a Jewish state," said Professor *Efraim Inbar*, director of the Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies at Bar-Ilan University, near Tel Aviv.

No wonder then that the meeting Monday in Berlin was significant. It was the first time the German and Israeli cabinets ever met jointly in Germany. Mrs Merkel initiated these special consultations, reserved only for a few countries, including France, Poland and Russia, after her 2008 visit to Israel, where she was given the rare honor of addressing the Knesset, the Israeli Parliament.

*Muriel Asseburg*, a Middle East expert at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs in Berlin, said Mrs Merkel's policy toward Israel was linked to the fact that she was raised in Communist East Germany.

Mr Polenz says that every German chancellor is responsible, rightly, for defending Israel because of the Holocaust. When it comes to Berlin's relationship with the Middle East, "we are not neutral," he said. "But that does not mean we cannot speak our minds to our Israeli friends."

It is different with Mrs Merkel. As chancellor, she set herself three foreign policy objectives: better relations with the United States, a much closer relationship with Israel and the integration of the European Union. These issues, said *Gerd Langguth*, a political science professor at Bonn University and Mrs Merkel's biographer, "are what Mrs Merkel inherently believes in."

Since the global financial meltdown, relations between the chancellery and President *Barack Obama* have become strained, not least because the United States openly criticized Germany for not doing enough to stem the crisis. As for EU integration, which

stention he intentionally lets the access to the data come to pass.

Of what use is data protection in Germany, if the EU grants the US Government and its agents' network permission and means to dispose of our financial data? The reason given is the alleged fight against terrorism – as is always the case, if the US ask their satellite states for financial or other services. Remember, the fight against terrorism was also the reason to get Germany financially and militarily (deployment of troops) involved into the war against Afghanistan, staged by the American industrial-military complex, its drug and oil lobby. For a long time the reason for the deployment has been lied about and it was veiled as peace-keeping mission. But finally, the new Defense Minister revealed the truth and shocked all parties including the SPD and *the Greens*, who had accepted the war. Thus he initiated discussions on the question whether the Constitution allows any German war effort at all, especially in regions where we do not have any business and where our interests are not affected.

The ever more strict entry requirements to the United States allegedly serve the fight against terrorism as well. In the past, airlines had reported all personal data on passengers prior to entering the United States, so that they could be properly controlled. Now, suddenly, this total control is no longer sufficient, the passengers have to be screened on their domestic airports with whole-body scanners. Another escalation might be that these nude photographs are made accessible to US intelligence agencies like CIA and alike.

The German Minister of the Interior *de Maiziere* and his party friend *Bosbach* have already signaled their government's consent to such nude scanning of flying passengers, which actually violates the private sphere and is therefore in opposition to the German "Grundgesetz" (Basic Law). They announced their intention to overcome the Liberals' resistance against this violation of human rights. Where is the cry of outrage in

the German media – apparently they have already been brought into line.

The author belongs to a generation which after the last World War and dictatorship have viewed personal freedom and democracy as the most valuable political achievements of our century, and has always defended those achievements. Now we have to face that

our German people, for which we always stood up, has stopped to exist, instead we have to accept a motley population in Germany,

a German nation and a German country no longer exist. Both were formally dissolved by the *Treaty of Lisbon* and were reinterpreted as European citizenship whatever this may be.

The political participation of the citizens has been more and more abolished by the concentration of power and new hierarchical structures within the EU. 60% of the local councils (parliaments), which still existed 20 years ago, have been dismantled by this concentration process. The participation of citizens is becoming more indirect and weaker, and more undemocratic. Now the ruling is from top to bottom, instead of from bottom to top.

Especially in economic terms we have lost our freedom. Dozens of authorities are regulating the life of every entrepreneur. They determine what he is allowed to do and what is forbidden, and he has to give more than 60% of his income to the state. Even for workers and employees it is more beneficial to rely on social welfare than to go to work to earn their life.

The above mentioned examples show how massively our personal freedom, our integrity, and our human rights are impaired, because it is the will of big brother across the big pond. We are waging an unconstitutional war ordered by the US, we let the CIA monitor our whole telecommunication (*echelon system*), we have to disclose our financial transactions to the American agents and organizations (*Swift*) and have to even present ourselves naked to the American authorities (whole body scanners).

Our politicians should not be surprised in case it comes to drastic reactions of the betrayed populations, as soon as people realize the violations of their constitutional rights, their human rights and their personal integrity.

## How Sovereign is Europe?

by Prof Dr Eberhard Hamer, Germany

Since the *Lisbon Treaty* has come into force most of the sovereign rights of the formerly autonomous 27 nations have been given to the political commissariat in Brussels. The treaty determines that nations and national citizens exist no longer but merely Europe and European citizens. We believed that this was a step towards freedom, democracy and security.

Even one day before the implementation of the *Lisbon Treaty* the EU member states had to decide – with the active support of the German Interior Minister *de Maiziere* – on an agreement dictated by the US, which grants the United States free access to the banking data of the central financial service provider *Swift* in Europe.

Washington had arranged this agreement with the commission's President *Barroso*. The European Parliament had been thwarted one day before it assumed authority and was thus denied the right to have its voice in the matter. The financial service company *Swift* is based in Belgium and carries out approximately 15 million financial transactions a day between 8300 banks worldwide. With the submission of the EU under the US jurisdiction all financial flows in Europe will now be monitored by the CIA and other American and Israeli intelligence services.

European politicians therefore rightly described *Barroso* as "stooge of the United States" in undermining European data protection. Since then, Americans have full access on any data, not only on data that arise while performing financial transfers from Germany to overseas, China, or South America, but also on any transfer within Germany, for example from Hamburg to Cologne or within Hamburg. The data, even data of completely innocent citizens, have to be stored for five years; of course, at the expense of the banks and their customers.

Specialists on data privacy have warned the German Federal Government and particularly the Minister of the Interior, to agree to this subjugation of the EU under the dictate of the United States. The Minister of Interior has not given his consent yet, but by his ab-

### Horizontes y Debates

#### The new Spanish Edition of Zeit-Fragen/Current Concerns

At the request of many readers the co-operative *Zeit-Fragen* will publish from now on a Spanish edition: *Horizontes y Debates*. It is published monthly. The first edition is already printed and can be ordered free of charge.

Please let us know addresses of possibly interested parties to whom we should send the journal.

"It has much to do with the former East Germany. It did not recognize Israel and did not assume responsibility for the Third Reich, the Second World War and the Holocaust. Merkel has tried to distance herself from that stance and to compensate for that East German past," Ms Asseburg said.

So while Mrs Merkel does say, as she said on Monday, that it is time for Israel and the Palestinians to become re-engaged in a peace process, Ms Assenburg says Mrs Merkel "would not publicly take a critical stance of Israel's policies and the occupation." Her goal is not to make the peace process a priority in Germany's relations with Israel. It is to have ever closer relations with Israel, regardless of the conflict.

This runs against the official German position of unequivocal support for the peace process and a two-state solution so as to realize both Israel's security and Palestinian aspirations. But analysts say that policy is not pursued. "A critical stance with regard to the occupation and settlement policies as well as active German engagement in the peace process should actually follow from Germany's historical responsibility and not fall under the taboo of the Holocaust," Ms Asseburg argued.

It will not happen under Mrs Merkel. It means that Israel, much criticized by some other E.U. countries, will always have a special ally in Europe, and Europe, for the foreseeable future, will remain unable to wield influence in helping end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Source: *International Herald Tribune*, 20 January 2010

# Islandia y el carácter demoníaco del dinero

Como uno de los países más ricos del mundo se desmoronó de un día para otro y las lecciones a extraer de ello

por Bruno Bandulet

En el verano del 2006, cuando volé a Islandia para observar el milagro económico en el círculo polar y encontrarme con representantes del banco central y del *Kaupthing*, el banco privado más grande, era inimaginable que esa economía tan desarrollada pudiera desmoronarse en sólo algunos días, en octubre de 2008. El producto nacional bruto (PNB) por habitante era más elevado que el de EE.UU., el de Alemania y del Reino Unido. El sistema de jubilaciones era ejemplar y estaba respaldado por capital; la deuda del estado era sólo del 27% del producto interno bruto (PIB), el presupuesto del gobierno era excedente; la solvencia de los préstamos estatales era AAA (la más alta solvencia), y el sistema fiscal con sus tasas muy elevadas, era un modelo para toda Europa.

## Islandia – laboratorio y presagio fatídico

Ciertamente, ya en 2006 el endeudamiento del sector privado y el enorme déficit de la balanza de pagos (ver *Gold&Money Intelligence* agosto/septiembre 2006) significaban riesgos, pero en los dos años siguientes han tenido que sumarse otros factores agravantes, para que el sistema financiero y económico llegara a desmoronarse. En el año 2008, el pequeño país Islandia devino un laboratorio y un presagio fatídico para todo el sistema financiero occidental basado en dinero sin respaldo. Surge la pregunta, si algo similar puede sucederle también a otros países. Sin embargo, los tres grandes bancos privados islandeses no habían participado ni en la burbuja informática que explotó en el 2000, ni habían invertido en papeles inmobiliarios sin valor, que en 2008 produjeron el crash en Europa y EE.UU. En una lista del manager asesor *Arthur D. Little* sobre los bancos europeos más eficientes, *Kaupthing* ocupaba el segundo lugar en 2006. Y aún el 5 de diciembre de 2007, el UBS escribió sobre los mismos bancos que en 2008 quebrarían: «Los bancos están bien administrados y pueden demostrar una balanza positiva como inversores inteligentes».

Como siempre en esos casos, la catástrofe resulta de una combinación de errores propios y ajenos. *Kaupthing* y los otros habían participado en empresas suecas y británicas (por supuesto a crédito) de tal modo que sus activos, antes del colapso, habían ascendido a 200 mil millones de dólares, es decir 11 veces más que el producto interno bruto. La relación fue tan alta como en Suiza, pero muy diferente por dos razones: primero, más de dos tercios de las deudas que se habían acumulado en el sector privado de Islandia (no del gobierno!) consistían en moneda extranjera; segundo, cuando la situación se tornó crítica, no había un banco central que pudiera actuar como prestamista de último recurso. El banco central (*Sedlabanki*) no contaba en 2008 con las necesarias reservas de divisas. No podía imprimir dólares o euros, en todo caso coronas islandesas, pero estas no eran aceptadas para el pago de deudas externas. Entonces, la primera conclusión: cuando una nación tiene un gran déficit en la balanza de pagos y se endeuda altamente con el exterior (que es también el caso de EE.UU.) debería poseer una moneda que sea aceptada a nivel internacional y que ella misma puede fabricar a voluntad. Para EE.UU. el juego se tornará peligroso cuando el exterior no quiera acumular más dólares.

Es fácil de entender por qué Islandia era vulnerable. Pero ella no se cayó por sí sola en el abismo, hubo que empujarla. Y de eso se encargaron los fondos especulativos británicos, y también el gobierno de *Gordon Brown*, la siniestra *Albion*. *Ásgeir Jónsson*, economista jefe del *Kaupthing Bank* relata en su libro como el drama se puso en escena. El libro está bien traducido y se lee como una novela policial. El autor sabe explicar de manera comprensible aún los hechos complejos.



Islandia. (foto mad)

Lo que resulta interesante es que lo lograron recién en la segunda tentativa. Los fondos especulativos comenzaron con su primer ataque en el invierno de 2005/2006, cuando la corona islandesa devino la favorita de los *carry traders*, cuando el banco central no hacía nada para frenar la fabricación tan rápida de dinero y cuando la economía y la bolsa estaban peligrosamente recalentadas. *Jónsson* muestra también como los fondos especulativos iban a la caza, como el ataque fue preparado dentro de un club informal de 50 de esos fondos (cotización de los miembros a partir de 50 000 dólares), como la corona y las acciones del banco se vendieron al descubierto y como, paralelamente, la depresión fue atizada con los Credit Default Swaps (contratos de seguros contra pérdidas). Un juego triple en el cual los efectos de los tres instrumentos se reforzaban mutuamente. Esto funcionó un par de meses, hasta que el gobierno islandés reaccionó, en un caso incluso hizo un reclamo oficial, y hasta que la norteamericana *Morgan Stanley* recomendó a sus clientes, de invertir nuevamente en las acciones de los bancos islandeses, porque «no se podía empujar al país hacia la bancarrota». A fines de mayo de 2006, por el momento, la pesadilla había terminado.

Pero como se hizo evidente en 2008, «la crisis de los geysir» de 2006, fue sólo un preludio y un último aviso. Según *Jónsson*, si los bancos hubieran sacado las consecuencias, ellos habrían podido vender sus participaciones financieras en el extranjero «con un beneficio considerable». Pero el trágico fin ya se entrevió el 31 de enero de 2008, cuando un grupo ambiguo de managers de fondos especulativos, invitados por los bancos norteamericanos *Merrill Lynch* y *Bear Stearns*, se encontraron en el *Hotel 101* en Reykjavik. *Jónsson* recuerda que la conversación se hizo cada vez más sarcástica, los managers se jactaban de sus ventas al descubierto y después se trasladaron a un bar donde el vino corría a torrentes, hasta que el primero de ellos quedó tendido en el suelo. La táctica era la misma que en 2006, pero esta vez la ironía de la historia fue que algunos de los bancos norteamericanos que estaban involucrados, quebraron antes que los bancos islandeses.

Después de la quiebra de *Lehman Brothers* en septiembre de 2008, y que el mercado interbancario se había desmoronado, los institutos islandeses no pudieron resistir. El 6 de octubre, el gobierno anunció una ley de emergencia: el 7 de octubre se nacionalizaron *Glitnir* y *Landsbanki* y el 9 de octubre *Kaupthing*. En los últimos días de septiembre, Islandia había vivido una afluencia de gente comparable a la de los años 30. Frente a los bancos en Reykjavik se formaban largas colas de clientes que venían a vaciar sus cuentas, hasta que sólo quedaron pocos billetes de 5000 coronas – el de más alto valor. El gobierno hizo imprimir dinero fresco en el exterior. En el

este de la isla hubo pequeñas revueltas entre los trabajadores inmigrantes polacos, los negocios de productos alimentarios estaban repletos de gente que venían a aprovisionarse, y muchos que desconfiaban del papel moneda, compraban artículos de lujo como botellas de Bordeaux o de cognac y relojes *Rolex*. Ese tipo de pánico casi hubiera podido tener lugar en Europa y EE.UU. Eso demuestra que la aceptación de una moneda sin respaldo es finalmente una cuestión de confianza.

## El extranjero niega su apoyo y formula exigencias escandalosas

La *Federal Reserve* norteamericana, el *Bank of England* y el *Banco central europeo* dejaron a los islandeses abandonados a su suerte.

No sólo eso. La inspección de las finanzas británicas confiscó las operaciones del depósito de *Kaupthing* y empujó a la quiebra a su sucursal *Singer & Friedländer*, la que en septiembre aún nadaba en oro.

Otros capitales islandeses fueron congelados por el gobierno de *Gordon Brown* basándose en la ley antiterrorista de 2001, y el 8 de octubre el primer ministro *Brown* incluso hizo poner el Banco central islandés y el Ministerio de finanzas islandés en la misma lista de terroristas donde ya figuraban *Al-Qaida* y los talibanes. Desde entonces, la reputación de Londres como bastión de la seguridad del derecho, está gravemente deteriorada. *Gordon Brown* se apresuró en declarar al país «en quiebras», lo que era falso, tanto en ese momento como lo es hoy.

El gobierno de Reykjavik continúa respondiendo por sus deudas, las que ciertamente durante la crisis han aumentado explosivamente; en 2010 se calcula que alcanzarán un punto culminante del 140% del PIB (se calcula que la mitad es en coronas y la mitad en moneda extranjera). Acuciada por Londres, la UE presiona brutalmente para hacer responsable de las deudas de los bancos al gobierno islandés y con ello a los contribuyentes, lo que ningún otro estado soberano aceptaría. No es exagerado de compararlo con el tratado de Versalles y sus consecuencias financieras. Se trataba obviamente de sentar un ejemplo: someter financieramente a toda una generación.

Ahora, gracias al control de los capitales, las presiones sobre la corona han disminuido. En el momento culminante de la crisis, ésta había bajado a 300 con relación al euro, pero últimamente el curso *onshore* (en Islandia) se ha establecido en 184 y *offshore* (en Londres) en aproximadamente 220. Mientras que la economía está todavía en recesión, el balance comercial de Islandia ya es netamente positivo, de manera tal que el país tiene posibilidades de recuperarse en un futuro próximo – siempre y cuando sean equitativas las condiciones de la UE y el FMI para el reembolso de la deuda. Por ejemplo, ¿por qué los islandeses tendrían que pagar por las deudas extran-

teras del *Landsbanki/Icesave* que representan el 60% de la actividad económica del país? Las exigencias británicas son escandalosas e inmorales.

Pero aún en el mejor de los casos, se necesitarán algunos años para que el sistema económico y financiero se estabilice. Los ingresos reales y con ello el nivel de vida han decaído, la desocupación ha llegado al nivel de Alemania. Los más perjudicados son los que poseían reservas de dinero. El mercado de las acciones ha perdido un 95%; en la bolsa, no se negocian casi títulos del país. Pero también los precios reales de las viviendas (adaptados a la inflación) han bajado en un 20% en 2009. Según un pronóstico del banco central, bajarán otro 25% en 2010. Los inversores privados del país que poseían préstamos de empresas han perdido prácticamente todo. Aquellos que habían depositado su dinero en el banco no han perdido en valor nominal pero mucho en valor adquisitivo, a causa de la inflación por momentos muy fuerte, aunque ahora ha disminuido. Las inversiones más se-

guras eran los préstamos indexados a la inflación, los llamados fondos *HFF*. Los fondos de pensiones sobrevivieron relativamente bien la crisis, porque ellos habían invertido la mitad de su capital en acciones en coronas indexadas a la inflación (y una pequeña parte en acciones extranjeras). La mejor de las inversiones hubiera sido el oro. Pero antes de la crisis, en Islandia casi nadie pensaba en comprar monedas o lingotes de oro; ahora, a raíz del control de capitales no se obtiene oro en la isla, aun cuando no esté prohibido poseerlo. Todos los que en occidente temen lo peor para los próximos años harían bien en estudiar el caso de Islandia. Se puede sacar una serie de enseñanzas útiles.

¿Y los fondos especulativos? Después de haber ganado mucho dinero vendiendo coronas y acciones bancarias al descubierto, han modificado su táctica en el punto culminante de la crisis; ellos compraron préstamos bancarios por sumas irrisorias y pudieron así multiplicar por seis su inversión. Cuando los bancos insolventes hayan sido liquidados, éstos pasan a pertenecer a los acreedores extranjeros, es decir a los poseedores de los préstamos. Siempre hay uno que gana. Los islandeses se solidarizan, leen más libros que nunca, compran sólo artículos del país en lugar de extranjeros, y responden a la crisis con cantidades de recién nacidos. Así reacciona un pueblo que a pesar de todo tiene confianza en el futuro. •

Fuente: Gold & Money Intelligence, Bandulet Verlag GmbH, Kurhausstr. 12, D-97688 Bad Kissingen. (Tel: +49 971 68257 Fax: +49 971 69056) [www.bandulet.de](http://www.bandulet.de)

(Traducción *Horizons et débats*)

## Horizontes y Debates

**Novedad: Edición española de Zeit-Fragen/ Current Concerns**

Por deseo de muchos lectores la Cooperativa Zeit-Fragen publicará también en el futuro una edición española de nuestro periódico con el nombre de Horizontes y Debates. Se prevé aparezca mensualmente.

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# Killer Games Must Be Banned Internationally

## How to continue after the ban resolution by the German Interior Ministers' Conference

by Dr Eva-Maria Föllmer-Müller

Already on 5 June 2009 the Conference of the Interior Ministers of the German Federal States (Bundesländer) demanded a ban on the production and dissemination of killer games as soon as possible.

The conference's topic was among other things the Baden-Wuerttemberg delegate's report concerning the school shooting at the Albertville-Realschule (secondary school) in Winnenden and in Wendlingen on 11 March 2009, in the course of which 16 people died. Item 4 of the conference's resolutions reads:

*"In view of the new incident of a school shooting the Conference of the Interior Ministers of the German Bundesländer regards it as necessary [...] to implement a ban on the production and dissemination of games as soon as possible, games, in which realistically presented virtually performed*

*killings or other cruel or inhumane violence against people or human-like creatures (killer games) make up an essential part of the game's plot."*

Furthermore, numerous police and preventive measures were resolved upon, including responsible media reporting, taking human dignity into consideration, thereby reducing the danger of imitation effects and the multitude of following threats to run amok ("copycat effect").

The Interior Ministers' Conference (IMK) takes place twice a year, in spring and autumn. Its members are the ministers and senators in charge of the interior affairs of their respective German federal states. "The IMK takes its decisions unanimously. A decision is only taken if all members support a motion in its essence and no member votes

against it. [...] As the decisions of the Interior Minister's Conference are taken unanimously, the implementation in the federal states is generally guaranteed." ([www.ham-burg.de/imk2010](http://www.ham-burg.de/imk2010))

This is said in an official statement on the IMK. This means, however, that the decision on the ban is shared by all German Interior Ministers.

The decision is adequate and urgently needed. The relation between killer games and excessive use of violence has been sufficiently known and documented by a bulk of scientific research.

With a speedy implementation of the ban on killer games Germany could make an urgently needed contribution to counter the problem of violence which has become grave in Germany as well as in many other countries.

The US killer game "Call of duty: Warfare 2" put on the international market since November 2009 presents a new step of escalation.

Part of the game is the detailed scene of a massacre, which is performed by Russian terrorists at a Russian airport and which finally triggers World War III. The gamer (ego shooter) chasing the terrorists as a CIA agent takes part in the brutal execution of all people at the airport. In the uncensored version he does so as a perpetrator and in the censored version he acts as an accomplice.

This massively violates World Peace (UN Charter, Art. 1). The killer game has already been banned in Russia and Japan. Experts on international law speak of a clear violation of humanitarian law, which means that all member states that signed the UN Charter and the Geneva Conventions have to take action. •

## Who Sells or Gives Killer Games to Children Is to Be Punished!

**In the canton Berne the Association against Media Violence (Vereinigung gegen Mediengewalt VGGM) successfully demanded that the efforts to protect children and adolescents from video games is being reinforced. Berne's cantonal government has to suggest a legislation to the cantonal parliament and at the same time to call on the Swiss Parliament (National Council, Council of States) to establish a certification authority for interactive media.**

In Switzerland there is an agreement that media violence is harmful. Even the industry association SIEA (association of commerce and producers) backs a more effective protection for children and ado-

lescents, however, they want it to be limited to intra-industry measures.

Due to a commissioned study also the Swiss Federal Council confirms the necessity of a protection for children and adolescents, but leaves this to the very trade, which makes enormous profits each year with brutal violence on the screen. Roland Näf, co-president of the VGGM, says: "Just as well the arms dealer could be in charge of gun control or the UBS bosses could decide on restrictions on bonuses."

With its reply the Federal Council passes the hot potato, to take effective legal measures, on to the cantons:

"It is the cantons that are invited to provide for the legal regulations accompanying the industry's measures of self-regulation and to announce state sanction measures in case of non-compliance or infringement."

In the same way Berne's cantonal department of justice has tried to give back the hot potato to the Swiss Confederation and is now being forced to take action by Berne's cantonal parliament (see media violence – extensive protection of children and adolescents). Selling or giving violence glorifying video games and films to children is to be punished. It must also be checked whether sanctions could be imposed against parents that

allow their children to use killer games and horror films, as a draft law in New Zealand does.

Berne, 25 January 2010,  
Association against Media Violence (Vereinigung gegen Mediengewalt VGGM)

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## Cultural Cleansing in Iraq – How Much Can a People Take?

by Hans-C. von Sponeck, UN Humanitarian Coordinator for Iraq (1998-2000)

Every one in Baghdad knew *Mohammed Hikmet Ghani*. The city was full of his sculptures. They were important reminders of the richness of Mesopotamian history and culture. Iraq had seen much better days. With the few materials Ghani had in his possession, he struggled to convert his artistic spirit into physical form. All he produced during those years reflected the suffering of the Iraqi people forced to live under sanctions and dictatorship.

Just before the US/UK invasion and occupation of Iraq in 2003, he had completed a first mould of a group of figures, women standing in a circle and gazing at a box in front of them. "They want to know what is in the box, what destiny is awaiting them. But they do not have the key to open the box", explained the famous sculptor. The artist and the people anxiously hoped for an end of 13 years of sanctions. Instead they were about to face a devastation and onslaught of unimaginable ferocity. Many are dead today and the artist lives as a refugee in Amman.

The contours of the human tragedy resulting from the illegal attack of Iraq in March 2003 and the subsequent occupation are becoming more and more visible. Much has still to be discovered and for the wrong doing a court of justice has yet to be found. In the meantime, the coffers of evidence are filling up.

"Cultural Cleansing in Iraq", a recently published account\* of the extent of destruction of Iraq's heritage and the assassination of the country's intellectual elite has added a new and gruesome chapter to the story of post-war Iraq. Through this publication initiated by the Brussels Tribunal, twelve specialists, both Iraqi and non-Iraqi, have made

it possible to grasp more fully the immense crimes against humanity for which many but foremost the US/UK occupation has to take the responsibility.

"Cultural Cleansing in Iraq" convincingly points to the profound degrading of a unified culture under the occupation and the eruption of hostile sectarianism that did not exist before. There was a formidable determination by the US Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) to implement an institutional and structural clean-up. The authors conclude that there had been systematic plans to "empty Iraq from its brain". The authors provide facts and much circumstantial evidence and refer to "genocide by other means" and "historical annihilation".

Killer squads on the streets and in detention centers were responsible for the death of hundreds of doctors, scientists, professionals, men and women. The Brussels Tribunal has compiled a list containing 413 names of Iraqi academics who have been murdered between 2003 and 2009. These were non-partisan and non-sectarian assassinations. There may be many more the reader is told.

To-date there seems little direct evidence of US culpability. Evidence, however, exists of continuous interference in post-invasion Iraq by many outside groups. These ranged from pro-Iranian forces to secret services of the occupying forces, those of neighbouring and other countries of the Middle East including Mossad, criminal gangs and others.

Using historic sites such as Babylon, Ur and Samarra for military purposes and refusing to protect sites of national pride and historic memory including the capital's museum of antiquity and the national library while en-

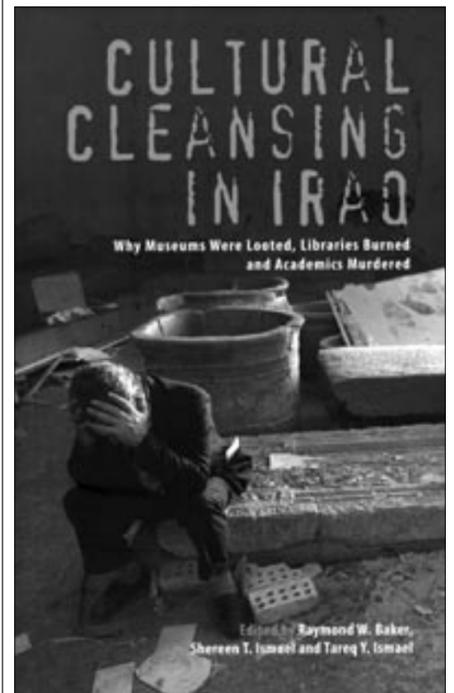
suring the safety of the ministries of oil and interior are given by the authors as evidence that the occupation forces ignored, without hesitation, their responsibilities under international law.

A free and democratic society was never the aim of the attack, they contend. They also reject the notion that that the murder of the mind and the destruction of Iraq's heritage could be explained by the occupiers' naiveness or by the incompetence of the US civilian authorities. What evolved did not constitute a series of unrelated and unpredictable mishaps. Robberies and killings occurred under the watchful eyes of occupying soldiers. The world is aware of more. The horrifying pictures of Abu Ghraib prison in the vicinity of al Fallujah which was another location of carnage, are indelibly stored in the minds of victims and television viewers around the globe. The excuse of collateral damage does not hold. Furthermore, the authors note, there exists a culture of impunity when it comes to Iraqi losses of life and personal or national treasure. They consider it malicious to blame the damage of looting of cultural artifacts on the conditions of desperate local people rather than on the occupying force.

None of the authors claims that direct or indirect accountability rests solely with the invaders. Their point that the cleansing of culture and mind and the destruction of the social fabric of a nation is the result of an illegal war can not be dismissed. Those who are responsible and accountable will certainly disagree. They will have little chance to succeed. The book is a powerful introduction to cultural cleansing in Iraq, which some prefer

to call cultural genocide. The authors agree that their work must be followed up by more research for the historic record, for the public knowledge and for the prosecution of those responsible. •

\* "Cultural Cleansing in Iraq. Why Museums Were Looted, Libraries Burned and Academics Murdered", edited by R.W. Baker, Shereen T. Ismael and Tareq Ismael, Pluto Press, London, 2010



ISBN: 978-0-7453-2812-6

## Hoping for Resistant Apple Brands

### Ancient wild type apples found in central Asia, resistant against plant diseases like scurf or fire blight

by Klaus Gersbach, president of Fructus (Vereinigung zur Förderung alter Obstsorten), [www.fructus.ch](http://www.fructus.ch)

Perhaps the Garden of Eden was situated in central Asia. And maybe Adam and Eve were expelled from paradise for nibbling a *malus sieversii* off the tree. This apple brand and some others – ancestors of our table apple *malus domestica* – originate from actual primeval apple forests around the central Asian region of Kasachstan and Kirgistan. They are also represented in the world's largest apple brand collection at the research facility Cornell-Geneva, upstate New York, USA. Phil Forsline is in charge of a breeding project there for the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), which could revolutionize apple production worldwide. He explained to a Swiss delegation of fruit experts, why the properties of primeval apple brands are so valuable for breeding new robust disease-resistant apple brands.

Most of today's apple brands in North America stem from seeds of those fruit which were brought into the country by immigrants from Europe between the 17<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This "gene pool" is also referred to as "Johnny Appleseed gene pool", named after one certain John Chapman (nick name: Johnny Appleseed), a missionary from Massachusetts, who sowed and observed a big number of apple seeds from Europe over 50 years and later planted them throughout the Middle West. The offspring of these seedlings was further selected and improved, especially regarding colour and size. That's how various magenta-red Delicious types developed from an initially almost colourless Red-Delicious. Also Golden Delicious, McIntosh and Jonathan stem from this gene pool. All these brands have the same genetic origin: *Malus x domestica* from central Asia.

But in the US there are also wild type apples, which are more than a 1000 years old and were probably brought from Asia by the First Nations, when they moved across the former Bering strait land bridge. The Geneva collection has got some offspring from these types, too.

#### Short history of genetic simplicity

It can be shown more and more clearly that all apple brands known today were brought from central Asia to Western Europe already in Ancient Greek and Roman times. Moreover, merchants spread plant material along the Silk Road.

Apple brands like Granny Smith and Gala, which are dominant on the southern hemisphere, are genetically very similar to the US ones, too. Granny Smith for instance was discovered in Sidney Eastwood, Australia, in 1868. It stems from seeds of the first apple tree garden planted in Tasmania in 1788; in turn, these trees originated from England. That means that almost all of today's apple brands worldwide have the same origin and show very similar genetic properties.

#### Adventurous expeditions to the Apple's homeland

Seeds and seedlings from the Caucasus, Kasachstan, China and Russia, on the other

hand, are new and different. They were collected in 7 expeditions financed by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) between 1989 and 1999. The objective was an extension of the narrow genetic basis of table apples. Plant material was collected in the primeval apple forests of central Asia and then transferred to the gene bank at Geneva, NY. Mainly material of the "proto-apple" *malus sieversii* was gathered, probably the most important ancestor of our recent *malus domestica* brands.

Phil Forsline took part in all of these expeditions. During our visit in the huge Apple Brand Garden in Geneva he told us: "In order to get into the Caucasus mountain area, we often had to travel by helicopter, we had to put up with long SUV rides on almost impassable dusty roads and endless walks. But what we found there actually doubled the genetic base of our collection here in Geneva. The effort paid off scientifically. It enabled us to look back into the developmental history of the apple for thousands of years. We discovered much more diversity of apple species than we ever had expected. For instance we now know *malus augustifolia* with its pinnate leaves or *malus ombrophila* with its dark brown fruit that look like little nashi and its big white lenticells."

#### White hope of resistance breeding

Brands of *malus sieversii* found in expeditions to Kasachstan are especially promising to breeders. Many of them have valuable resistance properties. Moreover their fruit quality is quite similar to that of our current brands of table apples. Brands used for resistance breeding often had very small fruit. The best known example is *malus floribunda*; most scurf-resistant brands produced today owe this property to that small apple. Some *malus sieversii* brands, on the other hand, are not only resistant to scurf, but to fire blight, too, and have the desired fruit size. With such material breeding aims as they are demanded today can be achieved much faster, because the necessary fruit size is already available.

Results of the first tests are promising: as many as 25% of tested brands from Kasachstan proved resistant to scurf. This is even more positive since this resistance came about by natural selection.

#### Kasach genes also in Swiss apple breeds

At various research facilities worldwide seven different types from the Kasachstan series have been tested as cross-breeds with "Gala". The offspring was scurf-resistant in 67% so far, and resistance against fire blight up to 30% was observed.

Apple breeder Markus Kellerhals from the research centre Agroscope in Wädenswil was able to obtain material of 10 fire blight resistant *malus sieversii* types from Forsline's collection 2 years ago. This year the first cross-breeds were performed with this material in



Phil Forsline. (picture fructus)

Wädenswil. In addition to that offspring of *malus robusta* 5 is available in Wädenswil. In this research Kellerhals collaborates with the research facility at Dresden – Pillnitz, where numerous different *malus sieversii* plants are grown.

#### Caucasus apple for a healthy basis

Resistances are very important for basis breeding, too. The ancient fruit forests in the Caucasus are real treasures for resistant root types. Forsline refers to resistances against *Phytophthora cactorum* (collar rot) as examples, but also those against *Rhizoctonia solani*, a fungus which seems to contribute to problems with seed reproduction in fruit cultures. Fire blight resistance looks promising for cross-breeding, too, it was mainly found in *malus orientalis*, the Caucasus apple, in the Russian Caucasus and in Sichuan. This fire blight resistance is especially valuable for basis breeding, since the available *malus orientalis* material has a good virus status and is robust against various other soil fungi.

Two of these so called Kazak bases, which stood extreme tests regarding fire blight and collar rot, have already been included in basis breeding programmes by Gennaro Fazio, fruit breeder from Geneva, NY. Fazio lead the tour

through his field research area and predicted a new generation of fire blight resistant apple tree bases in five years' time. Currently available fire blight resistant bases from Cornell Geneva (CG) are cross-breeds of traditional brands with *malus robusta* 5. An alternative to M9 is CG 41, for instance, a cross-breed between M27 and *malus robusta* 5. Apple trees with such bases grow in Switzerland, too, as research plants at Agroscope in Wädenswil and at the FBL in Frick.

Regrettably no licence has been granted to anybody in Switzerland yet, and therefore these bases are not available for practical use. Erich Dickenmann, who has a tree nursery in Thurgau and accompanied the tourists to Geneva, has tried several times in vain to get a licence; he vowed, however, he would do all he could to get these fire blight resistant bases for breeding in the near future.

The participants of the tour were quite impressed by the huge and probably unique apple brand collection. They are convinced that Swiss apple producers, too, will benefit from a new generation of brands and bases, bred by natural methods.

Fragment about the fruit research tour 19-23. August 2009, organized by Klaus Gersbach, Strickhof. Source: Fructus, Nr. 94 December 2009



*Malus robusta*. (picture fructus)



*Malus ombrophila*. (picture fructus)



*Malus sieversii*. (picture fructus)

## A Moment of Truth:

### A word of faith, hope and love from the heart of Palestinian suffering

*Appeal of Christian Palestinians to stop the occupation, Bethlehem 11 December 2009*



*A tall wall and a "security strip" run through the West Bank. (picture Reuters)*

A group of Palestinian Christians of several churches and church-related organizations published a fervid appeal full of prayer to stop Israel's occupation of Palestine.

The appeal was published at a meeting on 11 December 2009. This was at a time, when a great deal of Palestinians believed to be in a dead end. The document calls for the international community's contribution, that of the region's political responsible persons and that of the churches all over the world, to back the Palestinian people's efforts towards liberty. The appeal is meant as a word of faith, hope and love, even amidst "our catastrophe".

According to a similar appeal, which was published by South-African churches on the peak level of repression by the apartheid regime, in 1985. The document is called "Cairns' Palestine Document". The churches and the world public was roused by the South African appeal and concerted campaigns were initiated which finally terminated apartheid.

We, a group of Christian Palestinians, after prayer, reflection and an exchange of opinion, cry out from within the suffering in our country, under the Israeli occupation, with a cry of hope in the absence of all hope, a cry full of prayer and faith in a God ever vigilant, in God's divine providence for all the inhabitants of this land. Inspired by the mystery of God's love for all, the mystery of God's divine presence in the history of all peoples and, in a particular way, in the history of our country, we proclaim our word based on our Christian faith and our sense of Palestinian belonging – a word of faith, hope and love.

#### Why now?

Because today we have reached a dead end in the tragedy of the Palestinian people. The decision-makers content themselves with managing the crisis rather than committing themselves to the serious task of finding a way to resolve it. The hearts of the faithful are filled with pain and with questioning: What is the international community doing? What are the political leaders in Palestine, in Israel and in the Arab world doing? What is the Church doing? The problem is not just a political one. It is a policy in which human beings are destroyed, and this must be of concern to the Church.

We address ourselves to our brothers and sisters, members of our Churches in this land. We call out as Christians and as Palestinians to our religious and political leaders, to our

Palestinian society and to the Israeli society, to the international community, and to our Christian brothers and sisters in the Churches around the world.

#### The reality on the ground

"They say: 'Peace, peace' when there is no peace" (Jer. 6:14). These days, everyone is speaking about peace in the Middle East and the peace process. So far, however, these are simply words; the reality is one of Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories, deprivation of our freedom and all that results from this situation:

The separation wall erected on Palestinian territory, a large part of which has been confiscated for this purpose, has turned our towns and villages into prisons, separating them from one another, making them dispersed and divided cantons. Gaza, especially after the cruel war Israel launched against it during December 2008 and January 2009, continues to live in inhuman conditions, under permanent blockade and cut off from the other Palestinian territories.

*"Trying to make the state a religious state, Jewish or Islamic, suffocates the state, confines it within narrow limits, and transforms it into a state that practices discrimination and exclusion, preferring one citizen over another. We appeal to both religious Jews and Muslims: let the state be a state for all its citizens, with a vision constructed on respect for religion but also equality, justice, liberty and respect for pluralism and not on domination by a religion or a numerical majority."*

Israeli settlements ravage our land in the name of God and in the name of force, controlling our natural resources, including water and agricultural land, thus depriving hundreds of thousands of Palestinians, and constituting an obstacle to any political solution.

Reality is the daily humiliation to which we are subjected at the military checkpoints, as we make our way to jobs, schools or hospitals.

Reality is the separation between members of the same family, making family life impossible for thousands of Palestinians, especially where one of the spouses does not have an Israeli identity card.

Religious liberty is severely restricted; the freedom of access to the holy places is denied under the pretext of security. Jerusalem and its holy places are out of bounds for many Christians and Muslims from the West Bank

and the Gaza strip. Even Jerusalemites face restrictions during the religious feasts. Some of our Arab clergy are regularly barred from entering Jerusalem.

Refugees are also part of our reality. Most of them are still living in camps under difficult circumstances. They have been waiting for their right of return, generation after generation. What will be their fate?

And the prisoners? The thousands of prisoners languishing in Israeli prisons are part of our reality. The Israelis move heaven and earth to gain the release of one prisoner, and those thousands of Palestinian prisoners, when will they have their freedom?

Jerusalem is the heart of our reality. It is, at the same time, symbol of peace and sign of conflict. While the separation wall divides Palestinian neighbourhoods, Jerusalem continues to be emptied of its Palestinian citizens, Christians and Muslims. Their identity cards are confiscated, which means the loss of their right to reside in Jerusalem. Their homes are demolished or expropriated. Jerusalem, city of reconciliation, has become a

city of discrimination and exclusion, a source of struggle rather than peace.

Also part of this reality is the Israeli disregard of international law and international resolutions, as well as the paralysis of the Arab world and the international community in the face of this contempt. Human rights are violated and despite the various reports of local and international human rights' organizations, the injustice continues.

Palestinians within the State of Israel, who have also suffered a historical injustice, although they are citizens and have the rights and obligations of citizenship, still suffer from discriminatory policies. They too are waiting to enjoy full rights and equality like all other citizens in the state.

Emigration is another element in our reality. The absence of any vision or spark of hope for peace and freedom pushes young people,

both Muslim and Christian, to emigrate. Thus the land is deprived of its most important and richest resource – educated youth. The shrinking number of Christians, particularly in Palestine, is one of the dangerous consequences, both of this conflict, and of the local and international paralysis and failure to find a comprehensive solution to the problem.

In the face of this reality, Israel justifies its actions as self-defence, including occupation, collective punishment and all other forms of reprisals against the Palestinians. In our opinion, this vision is a reversal of reality. Yes, there is Palestinian resistance to the occupation. However, if there were no occupation, there would be no resistance, no fear and no insecurity. This is our understanding of the situation. Therefore, we call on the Israelis to end the occupation. Then they will see a new world in which there is no fear, no threat but rather security, justice and peace.

The Palestinian response to this reality was diverse.

Some responded through negotiations: that was the official position of the Palestinian Authority, but it did not advance the peace process. Some political parties followed the way of armed resistance. Israel used this as a pretext to accuse the Palestinians of being terrorists and was able to distort the real nature of the conflict, presenting it as an Israeli war against terror, rather than an Israeli occupation faced by Palestinian legal resistance aiming at ending it.

The tragedy worsened with the internal conflict among Palestinians themselves, and with the separation of Gaza from the rest of the Palestinian territory. It is noteworthy that, even though the division is among Palestinians themselves, the international community bears an important responsibility for it since it refused to deal positively with the will of the Palestinian people expressed in the outcome of democratic and legal elections in 2006. Again, we repeat and proclaim that our Christian word in the midst of all this, in the midst of our catastrophe, is a word of faith, hope and love.

#### A word of faith – we believe in one God, a good and just God

We believe in God, one God, Creator of the universe and of humanity. We believe in a good and just God, who loves each one of his creatures. We believe that every human being is created in God's image and likeness and that every one's dignity is derived from the dignity of the Almighty One. We believe that this dignity is one and the same in each and all of us. This means for us, here and now, in this land in particular, that God created us not so that we might engage in strife and conflict but rather that we might come and know and love one another, and together build up the land in love and mutual respect.

We also believe in God's eternal Word, His only Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, whom God sent as the Saviour of the world.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, who accompanies the Church and all humanity on its journey. It is the Spirit that helps us to understand Holy Scripture, both Old and New Testaments, showing their unity, here and now. The Spirit makes manifest the revelation of God to humanity, past, present and future.

How do we understand the word of God?

We believe that God has spoken to humanity, here in our country: "Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days God has spoken to us by a Son, whom God appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds" (Heb. 1:1-2)

We, Christian Palestinians, believe, like all Christians throughout the world, that Jesus Christ came in order to fulfil the Law and the Prophets. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, and in his light and with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we read the Holy Scriptures. We meditate upon and interpret Scripture just as Jesus Christ did

continued on page 10

**"A Moment of Truth ..."**

continued from page 9

with the two disciples on their way to Emmaus. As it is written in the Gospel according to Saint Luke: *"Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures"* (Lk 24:27)

Our Lord Jesus Christ came, proclaiming that the Kingdom of God was near. He provoked a revolution in the life and faith of all humanity. He came with *"a new teaching"* (Mk 1:27), casting a new light on the Old Testament, on the themes that relate to our Christian faith and our daily lives, themes such as the promises, the election, the people of God and the land. We believe that the Word of God is a living Word, casting a particular light on each period of history, manifesting to Christian believers what God is saying to us here and now. For this reason, it is unacceptable to transform the Word of God into letters of stone that pervert the love of God and His providence in the life of both peoples and individuals. This is precisely the error in fundamentalist Biblical interpretation that brings us death and destruction when the word of God is petrified and transmitted from generation to generation as a dead letter. This dead letter is used as a weapon in our present history in order to deprive us of our rights in our own land.

*Our land has a universal mission*

We believe that our land has a universal mission. In this universality, the meaning of the promises, of the land, of the election, of the people of God open up to include all of humanity, starting from all the peoples of this land. In light of the teachings of the Holy Bible, the promise of the land has never been a political programme, but rather the prelude to complete universal salvation. It was the initiation of the fulfilment of the Kingdom of God on earth.

God sent the patriarchs, the prophets and the apostles to this land so that they might carry forth a universal mission to the world. Today we constitute three religions in this land, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Our land is God's land, as is the case with all countries in the world. It is holy inasmuch as God is present in it, for God alone is holy and sanctifier. It is the duty of those of us who live here, to respect the will of God for this land. It is our duty to liberate it from the evil of injustice and war. It is God's land and therefore it must be a land of reconciliation, peace and love. This is indeed possible. God has put us here as two peoples, and God gives us the capacity, if we have the will, to live together and establish in it justice and peace, making it in reality God's land: *"The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it"* (Ps. 24:1).

Our presence in this land, as Christian and Muslim Palestinians, is not accidental but rather deeply rooted in the history and geography of this land, resonant with the connectedness of any other people to the land it lives in. It was an injustice when we were driven out. The West sought to make amends for what Jews had endured in the countries of Europe, but it made amends on our account and in our land. They tried to correct an injustice and the result was a new injustice.

Furthermore, we know that certain theologians in the West try to attach a biblical and theological legitimacy to the infringement of our rights. Thus, the promises, according to their interpretation, have become a menace to our very existence. The "good news" in the Gospel itself has become "a harbinger of death" for us. We call on these theologians to deepen their reflection on the Word of God and to rectify their interpretations so that they might see in the Word of God a source of life for all peoples.

Our connectedness to this land is a natural right. It is not an ideological or a theological question only. It is a matter of life and death. There are those who do not agree with us, even defining us as enemies only because we declare that we want to live as free people in our land. We suffer from the occupa-

*"One of the most important signs of hope is the steadfastness of the generations, the belief in the justice of their cause and the continuity of memory, which does not forget the "Nakba" (catastrophe) and its significance. Likewise significant is the developing awareness among many Churches throughout the world and their desire to know the truth about what is going on here.*

*In addition to that, we see a determination among many to overcome the resentments of the past and to be ready for reconciliation once justice has been restored. Public awareness of the need to restore political rights to the Palestinians is increasing, and Jewish and Israeli voices, advocating peace and justice, are raised in support of this with the approval of the international community. True, these forces for justice and reconciliation have not yet been able to transform the situation of injustice, but they have their influence and may shorten the time of suffering and hasten the time of reconciliation.*

tion of our land because we are Palestinians. And as Christian Palestinians we suffer from the wrong interpretation of some theologians. Faced with this, our task is to safeguard the Word of God as a source of life and not of death, so that "the good news" remains what it is, "good news" for us and for all. In face of those who use the Bible to threaten our existence as Christian and Muslim Palestinians, we renew our faith in God because we know that the word of God can not be the source of our destruction.

Therefore, we declare that any use of the Bible to legitimize or support political options and positions that are based upon injustice, imposed by one person on another, or by one people on another, transform religion into

human ideology and strip the Word of God of its holiness, its universality and truth.

We also declare that the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land is a sin against God and humanity because it deprives the Palestinians of their basic human rights, bestowed by God. It distorts the image of God in the Israeli who has become an occupier just as it distorts this image in the Palestinian living under occupation. We declare that any theology, seemingly based on the Bible or on faith or on history, that legitimizes the occupation, is far from Christian teachings, because it calls for violence and holy war in the name of God Almighty, subordinating God to temporary human interests, and distorting the divine image in the human beings living under both political and theological injustice.

**Hope**

Despite the lack of even a glimmer of positive expectation, our hope remains strong. The present situation does not promise any quick solution or the end of the occupation that is imposed on us. Yes, the initiatives, the conferences, visits and negotiations have multiplied, but they have not been followed up by any change in our situation and suffering. Even the new US position that has been announced by President *Obama*, with a mani-

fest desire to put an end to the tragedy, has not been able to make a change in our reality. The clear Israeli response, refusing any solution, leaves no room for positive expectation.

Despite this, our hope remains strong, because it is from God. God alone is good, almighty and loving and His goodness will one day be victorious over the evil in which we find ourselves. As *Saint Paul* said: *"If God is for us, who is against us? [...] Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all day long" [...] For I am convinced that (nothing) in all creation, will be able to sep-*

*arate us from the love of God"* (Rom. 8:31, 35, 36, 39).

*What is the meaning of hope?*

Hope within us means first and foremost our faith in God and secondly our expectation, despite everything, for a better future. Thirdly, it means not chasing after illusions – we realize that release is not close at hand. Hope is the capacity to see God in the midst of trouble, and to be co-workers with the Holy Spirit who is dwelling in us.

From this vision derives the strength to be steadfast, remain firm and work to change the reality in which we find ourselves. Hope means not giving in to evil but rather standing up to it and continuing to resist it. We see nothing in the present or future except ruin and destruction. We see the upper hand of the strong, the growing orientation towards racist separation and the imposition of laws that deny our existence and our dignity. We see confusion and division in the Palestinian position. If, despite all this, we do resist this reality today and work hard, perhaps the destruction that looms on the horizon may not come upon us.

*Signs of hope*

The Church in our land, her leaders and her faithful, despite her weakness and her divisions, does show certain signs of hope. Our parish communities are vibrant and most of our young people are active apostles for justice and peace. In addition to the individual commitment, our various Church institutions make our faith active and present in service, love and prayer.

Among the signs of hope are the local centres of theology, with a religious and social character. They are numerous in our different Churches. The ecumenical spirit, even if still hesitant, shows itself more and more in the meetings of our different Church families.

We can add to this the numerous meetings for inter-religious dialogue, Christian-Muslim dialogue, which includes the religious leaders and a part of the people. Admittedly, dialogue is a long process and is perfected through a daily effort as we undergo the same sufferings and have the same expectations. There is also dialogue among the three religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, as well as different dialogue meetings on the academic or social level. They all try to breach the walls imposed by the occupation and oppose the distorted perception of human beings in the heart of their brothers or sisters.

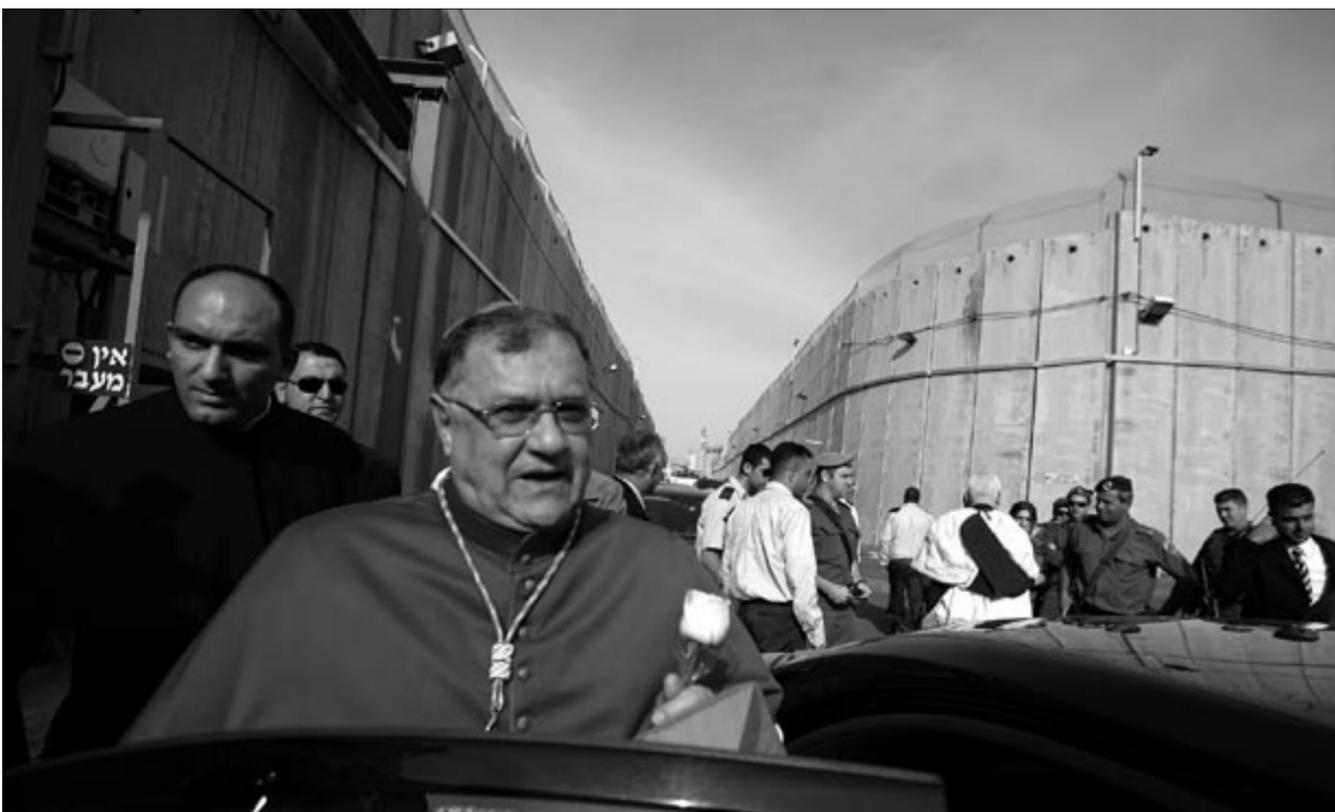
One of the most important signs of hope is the steadfastness of the generations, the belief in the justice of their cause and the continuity of memory, which does not forget the "Nakba" (catastrophe) and its significance. Likewise significant is the developing awareness among many Churches throughout the world and their desire to know the truth about what is going on here.

In addition to that, we see a determination among many to overcome the resentments of the past and to be ready for reconciliation once justice has been restored. Public awareness of the need to restore political rights to the Palestinians is increasing, and Jewish and Israeli voices, advocating peace and justice, are raised in support of this with the approval of the international community. True, these forces for justice and reconciliation have not yet been able to transform the situation of injustice, but they have their influence and may shorten the time of suffering and hasten the time of reconciliation.

*The mission of the Church*

Our Church is a Church of people who pray and serve. This prayer and service is prophetic, bearing the voice of God in the present and future. Everything that happens in our land, everyone who lives there, all the pains and hopes, all the injustice and all the efforts to stop this injustice, are part and parcel of the prayer of our Church and the service of all her institutions. Thanks be to God that our Church raises her voice against injustice despite the fact that some desire her to remain silent, closed in her religious devotions.

The mission of the Church is prophetic, to speak the Word of God courageously, hon-



On 24 December 2009, Fouad Twal, the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, could only go to Bethlehem through an Israeli checkpoint interrupting the wall. There he took part in a Christmas Procession outside the Church of the Nativity. (picture reuters)



### "A Moment of Truth ..."

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estly and lovingly in the local context and in the midst of daily events. If she does take sides, it is with the oppressed, to stand alongside them, just as Christ our Lord stood by the side of each poor person and each sinner, calling them to repentance, life, and the restoration of the dignity bestowed on them by God and that no one has the right to strip away.

The mission of the Church is to proclaim the Kingdom of God, a kingdom of justice, peace and dignity. Our vocation as a living Church is to bear witness to the goodness of God and the dignity of human beings. We are called to pray and to make our voice heard when we announce a new society where human beings believe in their own dignity and the dignity of their adversaries.

Our Church points to the Kingdom, which cannot be tied to any earthly kingdom. Jesus said before Pilate that he was indeed a king but "my kingdom is not from this world" (Jn 18:36). Saint Paul says: "The Kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom.14:17). Therefore, religion cannot favour or support any unjust political regime, but must rather promote justice, truth and human dignity. It must exert every effort to purify regimes where human beings suffer injustice and human dignity is violated. The Kingdom of God on earth is not dependent on any political orientation, for it is greater and more inclusive than any particular political system.

Jesus Christ said: "The Kingdom of God is among you" (Luke 17:21). This Kingdom that is present among us and in us is the extension of the mystery of salvation. It is the presence of God among us and our sense of that presence in everything we do and say. It is in this divine presence that we shall do what we can until justice is achieved in this land.

The cruel circumstances in which the Palestinian Church has lived and continues to live have required the Church to clarify her faith and to identify her vocation better. We have studied our vocation and have come to know it better in the midst of suffering and

pain: today, we bear the strength of love rather than that of revenge, a culture of life rather than a culture of death. This is a source of hope for us, for the Church and for the world.

The Resurrection is the source of our hope. Just as Christ rose in victory over death and evil, so too we are able, as each inhabitant of this land is able, to vanquish the evil of war. We will remain a witnessing, steadfast and active Church in the land of the Resurrection.

#### Love

##### *The commandment of love*

Christ our Lord said: "Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another" (Jn 13:34). He has already showed us how to love and how to treat our enemies. He said: "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous [...] Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5:45-47). Saint Paul also said: "Do not repay anyone evil for evil" (Rom. 12:17). And Saint Peter said: "Do not repay evil for evil or abuse for abuse; but on the contrary, repay with a blessing. It is for this that you were called" (1 Pet. 3:9).

#### Resistance

This word is clear. Love is the commandment of Christ our Lord to us and it includes both friends and enemies. This must be clear when we find ourselves in circumstances where we must resist evil of whatever kind.

Love is seeing the face of God in every human being. Every person is my brother or my sister. However, seeing the face of God in everyone does not mean accepting evil or aggression on their part. Rather, this love seeks to correct the evil and stop the aggression. The injustice against the Palestinian people which is the Israeli occupation, is an evil that must be resisted. It is an evil and a sin that must be resisted and removed. Primary responsibility for this rests with the Palestin-

ians themselves suffering occupation. Christian love invites us to resist it.

However, love puts an end to evil by walking in the ways of justice. Responsibility lies also with the international community, because international law regulates relations between peoples today. Finally responsibility lies with the perpetrators of the injustice; they must liberate themselves from the evil that is in them and the injustice they have imposed on others.

When we review the history of the nations, we see many wars and much resistance to war by war, to violence by violence. The Palestinian people has gone the way of the peoples, particularly in the first stages of its struggle with the Israeli occupation. However, it also engaged in peaceful struggle, especially during the first Intifada. We recognize that all peoples must find a new way in their relations with each other and the resolution of their conflicts. The ways of force must give way to the ways of justice. This applies above all to the peoples that are militarily strong, mighty enough to impose their injustice on the weaker.

We say that our option as Christians in the face of the Israeli occupation is to resist. Resistance is a right and a duty for the Christian. But it is resistance with love as its logic. It is thus a creative resistance for it must find human ways that engage the humanity of the enemy. Seeing the image of God in the face of the enemy means taking up positions in the light of this vision of active resistance to stop the injustice and oblige the perpetrator to end his aggression and thus achieve the desired goal, which is getting back the land, freedom, dignity and independence.

Christ our Lord has left us an example we must imitate. We must resist evil but he taught us that we cannot resist evil with evil. This is a difficult commandment, particularly when the enemy is determined to impose himself and deny our right to remain here in our land. It is a difficult commandment yet it alone can stand firm in the face of the clear declarations of the occupation authorities that refuse our existence and the many excuses these authorities use to continue imposing occupation upon us.

Resistance to the evil of occupation is integrated, then, within this Christian love that

refuses evil and corrects it. It resists evil in all its forms with methods that enter into the logic of love and draw on all energies to make peace. We can resist through civil disobedience. We do not resist with death but rather through respect of life. We respect and have a high esteem for all those who have given their life for our nation. And we affirm that every citizen must be ready to defend his or her life, freedom and land.

Palestinian civil organizations, as well as international organizations, NGOs and certain religious institutions call on individuals, companies and states to engage in divestment and in an economic and commercial boycott of everything produced by the occupation. We understand this to integrate the logic of peaceful resistance. These advocacy campaigns must be carried out with courage, openly sincerely proclaiming that their object is not revenge but rather to put an end to the existing evil, liberating both the perpetrators and the victims of injustice. The aim is to free both peoples from extremist positions of the different Israeli governments, bringing both to justice and reconciliation. In this spirit and with this dedication we will eventually reach the longed-for resolution to our problems, as indeed happened in South Africa and with many other liberation movements in the world.

Through our love, we will overcome injustices and establish foundations for a new society both for us and for our opponents. Our future and their future are one. Either the cycle of violence that destroys both of us or peace that will benefit both. We call on Israel to give up its injustice towards us, not to twist the truth of reality of the occupation by pretending that it is a battle against terrorism. The roots of "terrorism" are in the human injustice committed and in the evil of the occupation. These must be removed if there be a sincere intention to remove "terrorism". We call on the people of Israel to be our partners in peace and not in the cycle of interminable violence. Let us resist evil together, the evil of occupation and the infernal cycle of violence.

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**"A Moment of Truth ..."**

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**Our word to our brothers and sisters**

We all face, today, a way that is blocked and a future that promises only woe. Our word to all our Christian brothers and sisters is a word of hope, patience, steadfastness and new action for a better future. Our word is that we, as Christians we carry a message, and we will continue to carry it despite the thorns, despite blood and daily difficulties. We place our hope in God, who will grant us relief in His own time. At the same time, we continue to act in concord with God and God's will, building, resisting evil and bringing closer the day of justice and peace.

We say to our Christian brothers and sisters: This is a time for repentance. Repentance brings us back into the communion of love with everyone who suffers, the prisoners, the wounded, those afflicted with temporary or permanent handicaps, the children who cannot live their childhood and each one who mourns a dear one. The communion of love says to every believer in spirit and in truth: if my brother is a prisoner I am a prisoner; if his home is destroyed, my home is destroyed; when my brother is killed, then I too am killed.

We face the same challenges and share in all that has happened and will happen. Perhaps, as individuals or as heads of Churches, we were silent when we should have raised our voices to condemn the injustice and share in the suffering. This is a time of repentance for our silence, indifference, lack of communion, either because we did not persevere in our mission in this land and abandoned it, or because we did not think and do enough to reach a new and integrated vision and remained divided, contradicting our witness and weakening our word. Repentance for our concern with our institutions, sometimes at the expense of our mission, thus silencing the prophetic voice given by the Spirit to the Churches.

We call on Christians to remain steadfast in this time of trial, just as we have throughout the centuries, through the changing succession of states and governments. Be patient, steadfast and full of hope so that you might fill the heart of every one of your brothers or sisters who shares in this same trial with hope. *"Always be ready to make your defence to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you"* (1 Pet. 3:15). Be active and, provided this conforms to love, participate in any sacrifice that resistance asks of you to overcome our present travail.

Our numbers are few but our message is great and important. Our land is in urgent need of love. Our love is a message to the Muslim and to the Jew, as well as to the world.

Our message to the Muslims is a message of love and of living together and a call to reject fanaticism and extremism. It is also a message to the world that Muslims are neither to be stereotyped as the enemy nor caricatured as terrorists but rather to be lived with in peace and engaged with in dialogue.

Our message to the Jews tells them: Even though we have fought one another in the recent past and still struggle today, we are able to love and live together. We can organize our political life, with all its complexity, according to the logic of this love and its power, after ending the occupation and establishing justice.

The word of faith says to anyone engaged in political activity: human beings were not made for hatred. It is not permitted to hate, neither is it permitted to kill or to be killed. The culture of love is the culture of accepting the other. Through it we perfect ourselves and the foundations of society are established.

**Our word to the Churches of the world**

Our word to the Churches of the world is firstly a word of gratitude for the solidarity you have shown toward us in word, deed and presence among us. It is a word of praise for the many Churches and Christians who support the right of the Palestinian people for self determination. It is a message of solidarity with those Christians and Churches who



The Christmas Procession in Bethlehem on 24 December 2009. (picture Reuters)

have suffered because of their advocacy for law and justice.

However, it is also a call to repentance; to revisit fundamentalist theological positions that support certain unjust political options with regard to the Palestinian people. It is a call to stand alongside the oppressed and preserve the word of God as good news for all rather than to turn it into a weapon with which to slay the oppressed. The word of God is a word of love for all His creation. God is not the ally of one against the other, nor the opponent of one in the face of the other. God is the Lord of all and loves all, demanding justice from all and issuing to all of us the same commandments. We ask our sister Churches not to offer a theological cover-up for the injustice we suffer, for the sin of the occupation imposed upon us. Our question to our brothers and sisters in the Churches today is: Are you able to help us get our freedom back, for this is the only way you can help the two peoples attain justice, peace, security and love?

In order to understand our reality, we say to the Churches: Come and see. We will fulfil our role to make known to you the truth of our reality, receiving you as pilgrims coming to us to pray, carrying a message of peace, love and reconciliation. You will know the facts and the people of this land, Palestinians and Israelis alike.

We condemn all forms of racism, whether religious or ethnic, including anti-Semitism and Islamophobia, and we call on you to condemn it and oppose it in all its manifestations. At the same time we call on you to say a word of truth and to take a position of truth with regard to Israel's occupation of Pales-

tinian land. As we have already said, we see boycott and disinvestment as tools of non violence for justice, peace and security for all.

**Our word to the international community**

Our word to the international community is to stop the principle of "double standards" and insist on the international resolutions regarding the Palestinian problem with regard to all parties. Selective application of international law threatens to leave us vulnerable to a law of the jungle. It legitimizes the claims by certain armed groups and states that the international community only understands the logic of force. Therefore, we call for a response to what the civil and religious institutions have proposed, as mentioned earlier: the beginning of a system of economic sanctions and boycott to be applied against Israel. We repeat once again that this is not revenge but rather a serious action in order to reach a just and definitive peace that will put an end to Israeli occupation of Palestinian and other Arab territories and will guarantee security and peace for all.

**Jewish and Muslim religious leaders**

Finally, we address an appeal to the religious and spiritual leaders, Jewish and Muslim, with whom we share the same vision that every human being is created by God and has been given equal dignity. Hence the obligation for each of us to defend the oppressed and the dignity God has bestowed on them. Let us together try to rise up above the political positions that have failed so far and continue to lead us on the path of failure and suffering.

**A call to our Palestinian people and to the Israelis**

This is a call to see the face of God in each one of God's creatures and overcome the barriers of fear or race in order to establish a constructive dialogue and not remain within the cycle of never-ending manoeuvres that aim to keep the situation as it is. Our appeal is to reach a common vision, built on equality and sharing, not on superiority, negation of the other or aggression, using the pretext of fear and security. We say that love is possible and mutual trust is possible. Thus, peace is possible and definitive reconciliation also. Thus, justice and security will be attained for all.

Education is important. Educational programs must help us to get to know the other as he or she is rather than through the prism of conflict, hostility or religious fanaticism. The educational programs in place today are infected with this hostility. The time has come to begin a new education that allows one to see the face of God in the other and declares that we are capable of loving each other and building our future together in peace and security.

Trying to make the state a religious state, Jewish or Islamic, suffocates the state, confines it within narrow limits, and transforms it into a state that practices discrimination and exclusion, preferring one citizen over another. We appeal to both religious Jews and Muslims: let the state be a state for all its citizens, with a vision constructed on respect for religion but also equality, justice, liberty and respect for pluralism and not on domination by a religion or a numerical majority.

To the leaders of Palestine we say that current divisions weaken all of us and cause more sufferings. Nothing can justify these divisions. For the good of the people, which must outweigh that of the political parties, an end must be put to division. We appeal to the international community to lend its support towards this union and to respect the will of the Palestinian people as expressed freely.

Jerusalem is the foundation of our vision and our entire life. She is the city to which God gave a particular importance in the history of humanity. She is the city towards which all people are in movement – and where they will meet in friendship and love in the presence of the One Unique God, according to the vision of the prophet Isaiah: *"In days to come the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; all the nations shall stream to it [...] He shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more"* (Is. 2: 2-5).

Today, the city is inhabited by two peoples of three religions; and it is on this prophetic vision and on the international resolutions concerning the totality of Jerusalem that any political solution must be based. This is the first issue that should be negotiated because the recognition of Jerusalem's sanctity and its message will be a source of inspiration towards finding a solution to the entire problem, which is largely a problem of mutual trust and ability to set in place a new land in this land of God.

**Hope and faith in God**

In the absence of all hope, we cry out our cry of hope. We believe in God, good and just. We believe that God's goodness will finally triumph over the evil of hate and of death that still persist in our land. We will see here "a new land" and "a new human being", capable of rising up in the spirit to love each one of his or her brothers and sisters. •

**Die Verfasser und Verfasserinnen des Aufrufs:**

Patriarch Michel Sabbah, Bischof Dr. Munib Younan, Erzbischof Theodosios Atallah Hanna, Pfarrer Dr. Jamal Khader, Pfarrer Dr. Rafiq Khoury, Pfarrer Dr. Mitri Raheb, Pfarrer Dr. Naim Ateek, Pfarrer Dr. Yohana Katanacho, Fr. Fadi Diab, Dr. Jiries Khoury, Frau Sider Daibes, Frau Nora Kort, Frau Lucy Thalji, Herr Nidal Abu Zulof, Herr Yusef Daher, Herr Rifat Kassis – Koordinator der Initiative

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