

INTERDEPENDENCE

Day BERLIN 2010

I have just returned from Berlin -- with a side trip to Bilbao to address the Basque Government on Human Rights and Interdependence. I am exhilarated if also exhausted, (still recovering from my summer surgery). I want to report to you about our Eighth Interdependence Day Celebration and Forum in Berlin, September 9-12, and the exciting aftermath -- our plans now for the youth movement, our website, our global research activities at Dēmos and the globalization of our Interdependence Movement.

Surgery on a tumor in my arm in late August threatened to prevent me from going to Berlin, but the doctors approved travel. Happily, this meant I was able to participate in what was our most successful Interdependence Day to date. Successful not only because of the quality of our global participants around the theme of SUSTAIN/Ability (in climate, culture and civil society), but because of our success in moving from a one-off, once a year global city event, to a new movement in which young people, artists and citizens have agreed to play a leading role year round, and in many different countries.

You can see from the program that we had an amazing array of delegates from civil society, religion, the academic world, politics and business. Among the highlights were Dr. Hans Joachim Schellnhuber, the director of the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research, who keynoted our opening session on climate and also brought along four young Ph.D. students working with him; Bo Ekman, the former managing director of Volvo and philanthropist (whose Tällberg Forum has been pursuing international dialogue and understanding for thirty years); Ambassador Philip D. Murphy (President Obama's Ambassador to Germany), who was an articulate spokesman for the President's commitment to multilateralism and interdependence; Sasha Waltz (Germany's leading choreographer), whose work ZWEILAND (about reuniting Germany) was part of our 9/11 Memorial concert, but who also spoke eloquently about the role of the arts in bridging global differences; Lord Frank Judd, a founding Steering Committee member who inspired our youth delegates with a keynote about the future; Imam Dr. Abduljalil Sajid (spiritual leader of the UK Muslim community), who won this year's Interdependence Prize; Dr. Michael Naumann, former German Cultural Minister; and Jackie Davis, director of the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts who organized a gathering of artists in Berlin to help us think about next year and the cultural projects the group is organizing around interdependence at arts venues throughout the world.

On Interdependence Day itself, Dieter Kosslick, the creative director of the Berlin International Film Festival (Berlinale), who had selected and two wonderful short films, one which he presented at our Interdependence Day Celebration, made a surprise announcement to the delegates: Kosslick will sponsor an annual AWARD to a young filmmaker (producer, director, writer or even actor) whose work reflects a commitment to interdependence and global justice. Based on a selection to be made by the Interdependence Movement, the winning candidate will be invited to the Berlinale -- all expenses paid -- to participate in the festival and have his/her work shown. This is a very remarkable opportunity both for young, creative filmmakers concerned with interdependence, but also for the Interdependence Movement to motivate young film enthusiasts and artists to think about and create around our concerns.

We also introduced the pre-alpha version of what will be our new interactive website being developed by Kevin Cunningham to the delegates; it promises a new and valuable tool in extending the Interdependence Movement far beyond those able actually to attend our Interdependence Day Forums. We will also be working with our friend and advisor Keith Reinhard (former DBB chair) to develop messaging on the site.

But I was most excited by the growth in our Global Interdependence Youth Summit, and the new directions it will make possible. We all recognize that a movement aimed at making citizens aware of the interdependent character of the challenges they face in the world hardly makes sense if it cannot animate and engage the young people who will inhabit that future. In Berlin, 40 young people from 17 countries were with us, and committed themselves (and in some cases, their organizations) to working for a constructive interdependence in the coming years. Among the organizations represented were the OneVoice Movement (the Israeli-Palestinian youth group seeking to support the peace process), Brothers Keepers (a diverse collective of Euro-African musicians committed to fighting bigotry in Europe) whose lyrics focus on multiculturalism, tolerance and non-violence, and The Gathering For Justice -- an American organization founded by Harry Belafonte and other elders of the civil rights movement that engages young people of color, some ex-gang members, in intergenerational non-violent direct action to heal communities and generate an environment of hope and opportunity. A delegation of 12 young Americans left the USA to join us in Berlin -- they learned remarkable lessons, but also taught our delegates a great deal. I was particularly proud that our daughter, Nellie, worked with Harry Merritt to organize and oversee the youth summit.

As you might imagine, the presence of this energized, idealistic (but also skeptical) coterie of young people gave our work an edge and sense of hope that we will work off of in the coming months. On September 10, Brothers Keepers offered an interdependence concert which was organized and produced by Gina Belafonte that electrified us and 200 young people from Berlin who -- until then -- had known nothing of interdependence. Danny Glover and Harry Belafonte joined the concert by satellite feed. When music and young people are joined around the idealism of a more cooperative and just world, nothing seems impossible.

These are just a few highlights, but I hope they give you a sense of what we accomplished in Berlin -- and why I am grateful I was able to go despite the operation. We are now gearing up for our workshop on global governance (with my colleague Dr. Seyla Benhabib of Yale University who co-leads the seminar), as well as developing the website and focusing on the youth movement and our international cultural events. We anticipate a late fall event in New York around sustainability and interdependence that will feature Bill McKibben, Governor Howard Dean and composer/performer Pam Rose, who was with us again in Berlin this year.

I look forward to engaging with all of you as we move forward this year under the guidance and leadership of Dēmos, and its President Miles Rapoport (the Chairman of our International Steering Committee who has been with us at every Interdependence Day since 2005).

A closing thought: The Tea Party Movement seems to be trying to keep yesterday alive for a small minority of angry people; the Interdependence Movement will help bring tomorrow to life for us all, and prove that hope always triumphs over fear.

Benjamin Barber



New York, September 20, 2010

Presenting Co-Hosts:



RADIALSYSTEM V.
NEW SPACE FOR THE ARTS IN BERLIN

Dēmos