

Meeting of the Americas - Brazil Encuentro March 8-16, 2008 Follow-up Report

Keith Newman, John Freebury and myself, Sonja Bergen, represented Initiatives of Change-Canada at the Brazil Encuentro in Petropolis Brazil, held March 8-16, 2008. The aim of the conference was to bring together groups from the North, Central and South America in order to meet, learn about our respective projects, share experiences and ideas, and possibly seek ways to connect in the work that each are doing.

Over the course of the eight days, amongst many other things, we heard of initiatives happening in each country, participated in a 'Tools for Change workshop', and defined goals for the future of IofC in the Americas.

Perhaps, more importantly however, was the time spent building relationships with those that were in attendance at the conference. Although a language barrier existed between those that only spoke Portuguese and myself, it did not seem to matter. Past experience has taught me that we all speak a common language that does not involve words at all. This was absolutely the case at the conference as well. The participants were diverse in age, nationality, life experiences, and goals. The one common bond we all shared was that we wanted to make positive changes in the Americas. And this alone, was enough to make instant and lifelong connections.

My objective in attending this conference was to learn about the people and projects that are taking place in the Americas. As my educational background is in Latin American Studies, my interests run deep in the area. One of my objectives was also to see what connections and projects can be created between the work happening in Latin America and Initiatives of Change-Canada. Although I found that many of the IofC projects that are taking place in the Americas are rather localized and thus, somewhat difficult to partner with, I was more than pleasantly surprised by the organization Gente que Avanza. An organizer, a participant, and a past participant were in attendance at the conference, and having spent some time with them, it was obvious to me that this program was producing charismatic, interested, and driven leaders for the future. Some brief discussion took place about the possibilities that may be in working with Gente que Avanza. This is going to be further explored.

Overall, the conference met my expectations and more. I am very thankful for having been given the opportunity to participate, and especially to gain a better understanding of IofC and it's global community.

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