

Greetings from Anita Gerdes (Germany), participant in the 1st CIP program 1956 and one of the founding members of the Council of International Fellowship

By Anita Gerdes



Honoured Senator Mr. Wersich, Guests, Friends and Members of the Council of International Fellowship:

A cordial welcome to you all, thanks for coming and greetings from two of our founding members who are not able to be with us for this celebration weekend, due to health reasons. So I'm bringing greetings to you from Marlies Hornberger, participant in Cleveland 1957, who over many years edited our CI Magazine in her family owned printing shop without sending a bill, as well as from Gisela Senssfelder. Most of you know her as our very good friend from Germany who was with the program since its beginning in 1956 and side by side with Henry Ollendorff she was the creative mind and initiator to establish CIF. She is especially sorry that she cannot be here with us due to her severe illness. The doctor advised her not to travel from Bonn to Hamburg. She had planned to send a letter of greeting but at the present time she is not able to do so. So she sends greetings to all of you, wishing a successful symposium in remembrance of 54 years of CIP and 50th anniversary of CIF and asked me to tell you what she might have said or written to us.

So, instead of her I want to tell you a bit about why it happened that in 1960 our Council of International Fellowship was founded here in Hamburg at our third international meeting with the theme "Youth Work done by Voluntary and Statuary Bodies".

Gisela had been working at the United States Embassy in Stuttgart, responsible for German –American Exchange programs, its organisation and preparing the participants for their trip to the USA. In order to get to know the special aspects of the new 'Cleveland Program for Youth Leaders and Social Workers', which was the name of the beginning, in Cleveland, Ohio. Gisela was asked to accompany the second group in 1957 to Cleveland to take part in the theoretical program with lectures and visits in agencies, helped with some organisational things in the office and went for contacts to Washington D.C., before going back to Germany after 2 months.

Back to her regular work in Stuttgart she started to organise weekend meetings for the returnees 1958 in Darmstadt, Henry's home town, with the theme "education" and 1959 in Bad Liebenzell where the theme was "integration". Both meetings were small ones but already with international participation with friends from neighbouring countries. The result was the request of the participants to hold meetings every other year, to extend the time for about 3 -5 days and include lectures about social work, agency visits and have those professional meetings in other countries too, organised by former participants in CIP. That, however would cause lots of time, planning, monetary problems. The hosting of these meetings should rotate between participating countries and be organised by their members.

So Gisela Senssfelder and Henry Ollendorff discussed this situation at one of Henry's regular visits in Stuttgart and Bonn. Henry brought up exactly the same subjects: The sponsors of CIP in the U.S. such as the State Department, the Fulbright Commission, universities, the Neighbourhood Settlement Association, where Henry was the director. In addition leading Cleveland citizens and host families kept asking about the results of this unique new exchange program, its evaluation, follow-up programs etc. What would be the long-term benefits of their professional work and participants personally? Regular meetings every 2 years with a larger international group, evaluation of the recent programs in various countries, more intensive social work discussions and themes, recognition of such meetings by social work agencies, administrations and donors would possibly help to support our activities when asking for financial help, extra training days, etc. As a registered organisation we would be able to ask for funds which could be tax free for donors to help members from far away countries who would not be able to pay full costs of such meetings.

The realisation of all those plans, mainly the continuation and extension of the program would only be possible if we would found an organisation and have it registered at a civil court in Germany where the work started and activities started and Henry could help to write the constitution in German, because he had a Ph.D. in German law.

Henry explained all that to the audience of the conference in Hamburg 1960, making clear that this was a necessity for continuing our great project around the world. The audience voted for the new organisation and this was the birth of our board 'Council of International Fellowship'. Our exact birthday is November, 6th, 1960. Birthplace was the "Stintfang", a youth hostel in Hamburg. At this conference, representatives of the following countries were present: Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Lebanon, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and the former Yugoslavia. They also decided to establish a Board of Directors.

Until today we had 28 international conferences, 8 were held in Germany, 5 in the United States and all the others in so many different participating countries. Our friends in Cyprus are preparing the 29th conference in July 2011 and we are looking forward to it. Friendship and professional exchange around the world between organisations, participants, families, agencies and donors have fastened a strong band and built this wonderful bridge of peace and understanding. May it continue to grow for a long time in the future, finding generous donors, capable participants and leaders.

Thank you!