8-12 July 2025

CAUX DEMOCRACY FORUM - REPORT

REVITALIZING DEMOCRACY - TOWARDS INCLUSIVE AND PEACEFUL SOCIETIES ACROSS EUROPE AND THE WORLD

Caux Palace, Switzerland



TABLE OF CONTENT

Executive Summary 2
Opening Ceremony 4
Revitalizing Democracy: Values in Practice 8
Forum Format and Methodology 18
Thematic Tracks 20
Common Cause Groups 26
Reimagining Democracy(ies) 28
Young Changemakers Programme 29
Art, Culture and Community 30
Carrying the Forum Forward 34
The Forum in Figures 38
Acknowledgements 40
Partners 42

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Caux Democracy Forum 2025 brought together more than 350 participants from over 45 countries at the Caux Palace to reflect and act on the theme “Revitalizing Democracy – Towards Inclusive and Peaceful Societies Across Europe and the World.” Grounded in the values of One Humanity, Integrity, Trust, Courage, and Hope, the Forum served as a catalyst for dialogue, collaboration, and moral renewal at a moment of global democratic fragility.

Keynote contributions by international leaders emphasized the urgency of reimagining democracy as people-powered and peace-driven. They highlighted the dangers of eroding empathy, ethics, and trust in public life, while underscoring the need for inclusive, community-rooted action. This spirit of urgency and hope permeated the Forum’s three thematic action tracks - Healing the Wounds of the Past, Thriving Economies for People and Planet, and People Fostering Societal Cohesion - where participants engaged in courageous storytelling, intergenerational dialogue, and collective exploration of practical solutions.

Youth voices and collective engagement played a central role, with initiatives such as the Reimagining Democracy(ies) programme and the Young Changemakers cohort underscoring that democracy is lived daily through empathy, dialogue, and courageous action. The Forum also demonstrated the richness of the Initiatives of Change global network, strengthened by strong delegations from Japan, South Korea, the United States, and France. Notably, IofC France convened three round tables on the Middle East, showcasing how national initiatives contribute to the Forum’s international resonance.

Finally, the Caux Democracy Forum affirmed its place as a flagship element of the broader Democracy Programme of Caux Initiatives of Change, a four-year programme which aims to connect, equip and inspire people working for democratic governance at all levels, thereby contributing towards the growth of inclusive, peaceful societies across Europe and the world. The 2025 edition confirmed Caux as both a convening space and a launchpad for democratic transformation, connecting personal change with collective responsibility for a more just, peaceful, and hopeful world.






Philippe Lazzarini


Francesca Camilleri Vettiger


Hajar Bichri


Joseph Deiss

Photos: © Orjan Ellingvar

OPENING CEREMONY

REVITALIZING DEMOCRACY - TOWARDS PEACEFUL SOCIETIES ACROSS EUROPE AND THE WORLD

This was more than a theme; it was a rallying cry echoing through the Caux Palace as over 350 participants from 45+ countries gathered for the opening of the Caux Democracy Forum on 8 July 2025.

A global moment in a historic place

Set against the breathtaking view on the Lake Leman, the opening brought together youth leaders, diplomats, civil society changemakers, and peacebuilders, a vibrant mosaic of perspectives united by one purpose: to defend and reimagine democracy.
With music by violinist Jean-Marc Vignoli and guidance from moderator Ignacio Packer, Caux Initiatives of Change Executive Director, the opening blended personal storytelling, shared vulnerability, and stimulated collective reflection.

The Forum began with a powerful series of keynote speeches. The tone was urgent, emotional, and uncompromising in its moral clarity.

“Revitalizing democracy begins at the level of the people.”

In her opening remarks, Jacqueline Coté, President of the Caux Initiatives of Change Foundation, grounded the Forum in its core purpose: people-powered renewal.
With clarity and conviction, she reminded participants that lasting change starts not in parliaments, but in communities through care, participation, and shared responsibility.

“We must talk about peace. Everywhere, constantly.”

Joseph Deiss, Swiss economist and politician, delivered an unflinching critique of the erosion of democratic and moral standards. He warned against global indifference and condemned the “hellish merry-go-round” of moral decay.
In a speech that stirred the audience into silent reflection, he condemned the erosion of ethics in global leadership and urged a radical turn:
“We must trigger a contagious escalation of peace. We must force our leaders to talk about peace... Peace must become our obsession.”
His words set the tone for the Forum: unsparing in truth, yet unwavering in hope.

“The death of empathy is a sign of barbarism.”

Philippe Lazzarini, Commissioner-General of UNRWA, brought the audience face-to-face with the crisis in Gaza. With quiet urgency, he detailed the immense toll of war, particularly on civilians and humanitarian staff.

“Losing our empathy is a prelude to losing our humanity.”

He quoted philosopher Hannah Arendt to devastating effect:
“The death of empathy is one of the first and most telling signs of a culture on the verge of descending into barbarism.”
His testimony, both personal and political, drew visible emotion from the audience.

“Democracy is how we value human life.”

Ambassador Francesca Camilleri Vettiger, Malta’s Permanent Representative to the Council of Europe, reminded the audience that democracy is not merely institutional, it is deeply personal.
“Democracy is a reflection of how we value human life. Its erosion is silent, through disinformation, disengagement, and digital distortion.”

She warned against the transformation of social media into a tool of manipulation:
“Today’s threats to democracy masquerade as truth… The hashtags we follow may be reshaping the rules themselves.”
Her call: to defend democratic values not just with policy but with vigilance, empathy, and truth.

“Our journey began in Caux. And it continues here.”

Young voices also took the stage. Hajar Bichri, from the Creative Leadership youth programme, shared a video featuring the transformative story of youth leaders, many of whom began their journey in Caux and are now leading the “Reimagining Democracy(ies)” programme.

“Caux is not just a place. It is a starting point. This is where peacebuilding begins, with trust, friendship, and hard questions. Their work, she said, reflects the Forum’s heart: the belief that democracy can only be rebuilt from the bottom up.


Jordan Davis (USA)


Ambassador Nathalie Chuard (Switzerland)

Roohullah Shinwar (Afghanistan)



From left to right: Olivier Gfeller, Jacqueline Coté, Andreas Larentzakis

What lies ahead at the Caux Democracy Forum

Opening the five-day programme of the Forum, Ignacio Packer invited participants to engage with its core: five shared values. One Humanity, Trust, Integrity, Courage, and Hope and three action-oriented tracks:

- Healing the Wounds of the Past
- A Thriving Economy for People and Planet
- People Fostering Societal Cohesion

“This Forum isn’t about watching change happen, it’s about becoming part of it,”

Ignacio Packer

With over 60 sessions on the programme, the Caux Democracy Forum then moved into collaboration, connection, and concrete steps toward democratic renewal.

REVITALIZING DEMOCRACY: VALUES IN PRACTICE

ONE HUMANITY IS HOW WE RECLAIM DEMOCRACY

At the heart of democracy lies a fundamental truth: we are one humanity.

Ignacio Packer, Executive Director of Caux Initiatives of Change, opened the Forum by inviting participants to engage in “One Humanity” as well as with four other guiding values : Integrity, Trust, Courage and Hope.

As Jacqueline Coté reminded us, lasting democratic renewal begins with people, through empathy, care, and shared responsibility. Joseph Deiss urged a global awakening to peace.

Philippe Lazzarini warned that losing empathy is the first step toward losing our humanity. Democracy, as Ambassador Francesca Camilleri Vettiger said, reflects how we value human life; not just in laws, but in how we live, listen, and act.

Youth voices reminded us that change begins in community, with trust and courage. “One Humanity” is more than a value; it is the moral compass for our collective future, calling each of us to build a democracy rooted in dignity, solidarity, and mutual care.


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INTEGRITY: THE SPINE OF DEMOCRACY

On 8 July, co-moderators Jonas Truneh and Sarah Noble opened the Forum with a powerful invitation: “When words and actions no longer align in public life, how do we reclaim integrity as democracy’s foundation?”

Geneva politician Dilara Bayrak described integrity as a political choice in a system that often rewards silence: “We need laws that don’t just expect good sense, we need transparency that makes integrity the norm.” She spoke of the moral tension between public responsibility and confidentiality: “Sometimes doing the right thing means saying nothing and still showing up.”

Ambassador Christian Guillermet-Fernández (Costa Rica) called integrity “the inner rule of law”, a compass that keeps diplomacy grounded.

Corinne Momal-Vanian, Executive Director at Koffi Annan Foundation, shared how integrity meant facing failure, recalling the UN’s role in Haiti’s cholera epidemic: “Integrity means taking responsibility, even when it hurts.”

Elder Alvin of the Shoshone and Haudenosaunee traditions reminded us that “integrity lives in nature’s laws.” Each tree, like each person, grows differently, yet belongs.

Afghan lawyer and journalist Shukria Barakzai declared: “Let integrity not be a luxury.” Speaking truth under dictatorship had cost her dearly. “Silence was greater than strength.”

On July 9, co-moderators Sophie Kayes and Daniel Clements led the session on Personal Stories and Conversations, featuring powerful testimonies of lived integrity.

Marina Litvinenko, whose husband was assassinated for exposing Russian state crimes, shared her fight for justice: “We must believe in ourselves and be strong.”

Dr. Drissa Kanambaye, Mission Manager in the Communication and Public Relations Unit at the Office of the Prime Minister of Mali, described building health and education systems his country:

“Instead of cursing the darkness, let’s light a candle.”

Lee Ju-Young, President of IofC Korea, spoke of staying with grieving families after a ferry tragedy in Korea: “Integrity is not in titles, it is in staying, when others leave.”


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LESSONS LEARNED?

Integrity was tested, questioned, lived. Participants explored how integrity holds when institutions falter, and how personal courage shapes public trust.

Integrity, we learned, is coherence, between word and action, law and justice, promise and truth. From UN halls to Afghan streets, from village libraries in Mali to Korea’s coastlines, speakers revealed integrity not as perfection, but as perseverance.

Interaction with the audience and the group work revealed that integrity is not abstract, it is lived. In silence and in speech, in staying when it’s easier to walk away, in the choice to lead with conscience even when no one is watching. One reflection from the audience captured it well:

“Integrity doesn’t always speak.
But when it does, you remember the sound.”

Participants were invited not just to listen but to engage throughout the Forum. To sit with discomfort. To reflect. In impromptu conversations around Caux’s esplanade, its park and forests and hallways, a common refrain emerged: “Integrity may be quiet, but it echoes.”

TRUST: THE THREAD OF DEMOCRACY

At the Caux Democracy Forum 2025, trust echoed as a daily act. It was lived. Participants explored how trust is lost and rebuilt through human connection. Trust begins in the body, in bold conversations, and in the quiet choice to stay present, even in crisis. From Afghan women's shelters to Ukrainian community halls, refugee journeys to media frontlines, one truth resonated: trust is not given, it is built. Built in silence and in dialogue, in standing up and standing alongside.

Whether activist, policymaker, student, or journalist, the call was clear: become trustworthy and be willing to trust. Because the work of democracy begins not with systems, but with us.

On 8 July, co-moderators Sidra Raslan (Syria) and Ignacio Packer led a powerful conversation on trust across borders and institutions. Ambassador Nathalie Chuard (Switzerland) stressed the importance of institutional credibility: "Trust cannot be demanded from citizens, it must be earned."

Roohullah Shinwari (Afghanistan) spoke from personal experience as a refugee: "The hardest part was not being accepted - it was not being seen." For him, trust begins in everyday gestures: "An invitation. A shared coffee. A handshake that says: you matter here."

Anas Ansar (Bangladesh) reflected on how a bold request at a conference changed his career path: "Trusting the unknown, and oneself, can change everything."



Mahbouba Seraj (Afghanistan)



Jordan Davis (USA/Switzerland) shared how, as a journalist in a divided America, he built trust by listening deeply: "Trust is built through conversation, not confrontation."

Two days later, on 10 July, the conversation turned inward. Co-moderators Maruee Pahuja (India) and Sarah Noble (Canada/Switzerland) opened the session with a reminder: "Trust turns a room of strangers into a space of change."

Mahbouba Seraj (Afghanistan), who stayed in Kabul after the Taliban's return, shared: "That trust to me is my life. And that trust to me is the life of the women of Afghanistan."

Kateryna Maltseva (Ukraine) described building participatory democracy under siege: "Democracy is born where people take responsibility - even under shelling."

Ismar Villavivencio (Honduras/Uruguay) closed with a reflection on embodiment: "Trust is not from the head - it's from the whole body." Together, these voices reminded us that trust is not inherited - it is created, step by step, and story by story.

The audience was part of the dialogue. In small group exchanges and open-floor moments, participants shared personal stories and posed tough questions. An American participant offered a public apology for the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan. A Tunisian asked: "If government blocks education, can we build our own?" One disagreement prompted a powerful response from Mahbouba Seraj: "I am not everyone's representative. But for some women, I am. And that is enough."

LESSONS LEARNED?

These moments showed that trust is not abstract, it's lived. In discomfort and dialogue, in quiet listening and bold truth-telling. The sessions offered no easy answers, but they gave something deeper: a call to practice trust in how we show up, engage, and lead.

As the conversation closed for the day, moderator Ignacio Packer offered a clear reminder of what's at stake: "No trust, no democracy."

COURAGE: THE HEARTBEAT OF DEMOCRACY

From war zones to exile, from underground classrooms to political cartoons, stories revealed that courage is not the absence of fear, but the decision to act anyway.
Courage showed up in a Georgian mother who stood unarmed in front of tanks, whispering to her son: “Don’t show your fear. It makes it harder for them to kill us.” Konstantine Gagnidze recalled, “That day, they didn’t fire. That is courage, standing tall despite fear.”

It echoed in the voice of Bahistha Nohtani, who grew up learning in secret as her mother ran an underground school under Taliban rule. “Not a single moment of our life isn’t an act of resistance,” she said. “I’m not extraordinary. But I had courage and I still do. Every Afghan woman does.”

On 8 July, co-moderators John Bond (UK) and Manuela Garay (Canada) invited participants to explore courage as a daily practice. “Courage isn’t about the absence of fear - it’s about choosing not to be led by it,” said Bond. Garay added: “When we tell our stories with courage, we help others find theirs.”

For Gado, the East African cartoonist known for challenging power through satire, real courage lies not in bold lines, but in honoring unheard voices. “I hesitate to call myself courageous,” he said. “Real courage is in those whose stories we never hear.”

Hamza Ghandour, a Lebanese peacebuilder, reminded us that courage can be quiet: “Courage is apologizing when ego says no. It’s being vulnerable enough to choose peace.” He quoted Imam Ali: “The best of men is the one whose anger does not distance him from truth.”

Shahida Tulaganova, an Uzbek filmmaker, shared the stories of abducted Ukrainian children who found their way to freedom. “Children taught me resilience. Even after being abducted or maimed, they choose to live - and to hope.”





“Democracy is built on courage, sustained by trust and defended by integrity.”

On 11 July, the conversation deepened. Co-moderated by John Bond and Sawsan Raslan, the session explored courage in the face of repression. “Courage isn’t just resistance,” said Raslan. “It’s choosing to care, even when the world grows numb.” Natalia Arno, exiled from Russia, shared her survival after being poisoned: “Courage is acting not without fear, but despite it.”

Oleksandra Matviychuk, in a video message, reminded us: “War is not about tanks, it’s about torn families and silenced voices. Courage is standing with people.”
Yukihisa Fujita (Japan) reflected: “Truth-telling about the past is not shameful. It is an act of patriotic courage.”

Farai Maguwu (Zimbabwe) concluded: “When injustice becomes personal, you either walk away or you stand up. I chose to stay.”

Throughout the forum, the message rang clear: courage is not a heroic moment, it’s a daily choice. It is found in apology and resistance, in memory and imagination, in protest and quiet presence.
One participant from Kashmir offered this truth: “Survival can be a revolutionary act.” Another added: “Even small creative acts - art, music - can be courage.”
A participant summed up: “Courage is to be the change. Fear is a liar. Care is our compass.”

LESSONS LEARNED?

Courage is within reach and is the heartbeat of democratic life. Because democracy depends not just on laws or leaders, but on people who have the courage to speak the truth, stand for justice, and care for others.

HOPE: THE LIGHT OF DEMOCRACY

The closing ceremony of the Caux Democracy Forum 2025, held on 12 July in conjunction with the International Day of Hope, highlighted hope as both an emotional resource and a practical tool to navigate today's democratic challenges. In a time marked by uncertainty and division, hope was presented as a force to build trust, resilience, and shared humanity. Changemakers gathered to exchange stories and reflections, grounding the week in honest dialogue, deep listening, and collective action.

Viviane Straub (Germany) opened with a poetic reflection on "active hope," urging participants to see hope not as distant optimism but as a driver of movement. A youth-led symbolic exercise invited participants to imagine hope through images of butterflies, turtles, sunflowers, the colour green, or the season of spring - reminders of its strength and fragility.

Peter Rundell (Zimbabwe/UK) introduced the concept of the "polycrisis" - the intertwining of climate change, inequality, and authoritarianism - emphasizing the need for unified action under the banner of "Together".

The Creative Leadership cohort drew on experiences from Afghanistan, refugee communities, and human rights work to redefine democracy as an evolving process rooted in empathy and social restoration. Young Changemakers Maureen and Jan echoed this, highlighting dignity, nonviolence, and courage as essential values.

Other contributions explored how dialogue and action intersect in protracted conflicts. Rafaël Tyszblat (France) emphasized the slow work of rehumanization; Nabila Musleh (Afghanistan) reminded that "silence is not absence," sharing Afghan women's subtle forms of resistance; and Arshalouys Tenbelian (Lebanon) illustrated how truth-telling and generational healing can foster reconciliation across divided communities.

The Forum also celebrated the power of the arts - film, poetry, performance, and painting - to express what policy or negotiation cannot. Common Cause Groups met daily to connect and propose practical responses, showing how collective reflection can lead to concrete initiatives. Children's sessions, full of creativity and imagination, reminded participants that renewing hope begins with fresh perspectives.

"Hope should not be a fallacy...
It should lead to movement!"

On the final day, they presented their insights to the full Forum. The full extent of these refelexions will be captured on page 22 and 23.

LESSONS LEARNED?

Hope is not passive optimism - it is action, courage, empathy, and connection. Democracy thrives when we cultivate hope in ourselves and others, transform dialogue into practice, and renew our commitment to a shared humanity.



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FORUM FORMAT AND METHODOLOGY

The Caux Democracy Forum is not only a place of debate, but a space of deliberate encounter and collective exploration. Its participatory format brings together people from all walks of life - diplomats, activists, business leaders, youth, artists, faith representatives, and academics - made possible in part thanks to the Forum's Solidarity Fund, which ensures the presence of voices from less privileged backgrounds and diverse regions of the world.
Each day began with the Greetings of the Day ceremony around the Sacred Fire, facilitated by representatives of Indigenous First Peoples. Through expression of solidarity, of care and hope, songs, and symbolic gestures, the gathering reaffirmed the Forum's commitment to One Humanity, respect for the Earth, and shared responsibility.

This connection to the Earth was further embodied in the natural setting of the Forum itself. Overlooking the Léman and surrounded by the Swiss Alps, the Caux Palace offered not just a physical venue, but a symbolic reminder of the interdependence between humanity and nature. Walks in the gardens, conversations on the terraces, and moments of contemplation in the forest trails nearby gave participants the opportunity to integrate dialogue with the serenity and inspiration of the environment.

Following this, participants were invited to a Moment of Quiet Reflection. Set to live music, these sessions encouraged silence or reflection, allowing participants to pause, breathe, and connect inwardly before engaging in the Forum's dialogues.

"Through powerful keynotes, dynamic workshops and thought-provoking exhibitions, the forum spotlighted the essential values needed to revitalise democracy in Europe and beyond. "

Participant feedback

The rhythm of the programme blended morning plenaries, where lived-experience spotlights addressed the Forum's central values and urgent challenges, with afternoon thematic tracks, where participants engaged in smaller, interactive workshops focused on healing, cohesion, and sustainable economies. Complementing these were the Common Cause Groups, cross-cutting spaces of deliberation where participants reflected together on shared priorities, drafted proposals, and explored avenues for joint action.

"From candlelight conversations and storytelling sessions to thematic deep-dives - every moment at Caux challenged my assumptions and sparked new questions."

Participant feedback

Evenings closed on a note of contemplation and artistry. The Taizé songs at the Caux Chapel provided a gentle and communal way of concluding the day - interweaving music, spirituality, and artistic expression.
These moments, alongside exhibitions, concerts, and informal exchanges on the esplanade or in the Bell Epoque rooms of the Caux Palace, underscored that democracy is lived not only in formal dialogue, but also in community, art, and silence.

Through this careful balance of plenary inspiration, deliberative dialogue, cultural expression, spiritual grounding, and immersion in nature, the Forum methodology nurtured an environment where both head and heart were engaged. Participants left not only with new knowledge and tools, but also with strengthened trust, courage, and a renewed sense of belonging to a wider human community.

THEMATIC TRACKS

HEALING THE WOUNDS OF THE PAST

The Healing the Wounds of the Past thematic track offered a series of empowering workshops and moving conversations that brought together voices from Afghanistan, Guinea, Ukraine, Armenia, Russia, and beyond. Participants reflected on personal and collective trauma, historical injustice, and the ongoing struggle for truth, dignity, and reconciliation.

Sessions addressed the silences surrounding Afghan women's experiences, the cost of resisting dictatorship, and the legacy of military rule in Guinea. Participants engaged with testimonies, storytelling, and scenario-based reflection to address the moral complexities of truth, justice, and healing.

One session also coincided with a round table from a series organised by Initiatives of Change France, which explored Middle Eastern conflicts through French perspectives, drawing on academic, religious, and civic voices to deepen understanding and reimagine responses to long-standing divisions.

Throughout the track, participants were not only heard - they were uplifted. These sessions fostered reflection, built connections, and encouraged individuals to become agents of healing in their own fractured communities.

Coordination: Sophia Kayes (UK)

EVENTS

- 9 July (14:30-16:00): Facing Dictators: The Power of Truth Over Tyranny
- 9 July (17:00-18:30): Resisting Repression, Imagining Justice: Guinea, Military rule, and the Fight for Accountability
- 10 July (14:30-16:00): Carrying the Unspoken: Afghan Women and the Work of Remembering
- 10 July (17:00-18h30): From Wounds to Bridges: Overcoming Enmity and Reclaiming Connection
- 11 July (14:30-16:00): Where the Past Still Bleeds: A Workshop on Memory, Healing and Reconciliation
- 11 July (17:00-18:30): Joint Event with Common Cause Group "Conflicts in the Middle East - Perspective from France": Building International Awareness on the Middle East Conflicts



Arshalouys Tenbelian (Lebanon)



Natalia Arno (Russia)

PEOPLE FOSTERING SOCIETAL COHESION

This thematic track explored four key aspects of democratic practice. The first session focused on enabling participants to conduct both public and private democracy dialogues and to facilitate constructive conversations with an example from Augsburg, Germany.

The second emphasized building teams for sustained, community-led action, drawing on examples from Richmond, USA.

A third session examined tools for engaging with authorities, featuring the Mayor of Auger-Saint-Vincent, France, and his fight to empower French citizens to regain a voice and influence policy through open and inclusive democratic dialogue.

Finally, a case study on the 1955 Bonn-Copenhagen Declarations highlighted how shared rights across diverse groups can foster inclusive, resilient societies.



Event “The Voices of Citizens: Between Grievances and Participation”, with Dilara Bayrak, Allan-Charles Chipman (IofC USA), Fabrice Dalongeville, Jordan Davis



Coordination: Christoph Spreng (Switzerland) & Dr Laurie Johnston (USA)

Read more

EVENTS

- 9 July (14:30-16:00): Promoting Democracy Dialogue - Constructive Conversations
- 10 July (14:30-16:00): Sustained Action: Communities With a Purpose
- 10 July (17:00-18h30): Working for Good Democractic Governance
- 10 July (20:00): The Voices of Citizens - Between Grievances and Participation
- 11 July (17:00-18:30): Pioneering Minority Rights: The Bonn-Copenhagen Declarations

THRIVING ECONOMIES FOR PEOPLE AND THE PLANET

Democracy can only thrive where the economy allows everyone to have a reasonably equitable standard of living. If the gap between rich and poor is wide, the rich tend to use their wealth to maintain power, and the poor lose out. And if economic growth is environmentally destructive, everyone ultimately loses.

This workstream focused on examples of good policy and good practice from across the world, in prosperous countries, in desperately poor countries, in countries torn by conflict. Our aim was to demonstrate that, whatever the situation, citizens can pioneer ventures which strengthen human rights, just governance and sustainable economies.



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Coordination: John Bond (UK/Australia) & Asheesh Khaneja (India)

EVENTS

- 9 July (14:30-16:00): AI, Inner Growth and the Future Of Democracy
- 9 July (17:00-18:30): Socially Responsible Business - A Japanese Initiative
- 10 July (14:30-16:00): How Can Africa and the World Together Create Thriving African Economies?
- 10 July (17:00-18h30): Transforming Economies for Ecological and Social Flourishing
- 11 July (14:30-16:00): How Can We Each Advance Human Rights in Our Situation?
- 11 July (17:00-18:30): A Course to Help Rebuild a Shattered Nation



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Zoom on the "AI, Inner Growth and the future of Democracy" session!

Facilitated by Sandra Uwantege Hart with panelists Asheesh Khaneja and Tea Mustać, the session explored the intersection of artificial intelligence, inner growth and the future of democracy. Its primary objectives were to demystify AI for civil society, surface practical opportunities for NGOs and foundations, and identify risks that demand collective attention.

Topics covered included misinformation and algorithmic polarisation; practical uses of AI for fundraising, outreach and content moderation; implications of regulatory frameworks such as the EU AI Act; and strategies for building community-level AI resilience.

Taiwan as a case study was presented as a clear proof point. Concrete examples and personal stories were shared and the session concluded with clear calls to action.

Key takeaways: participants expressed a strong need to better understand how local bodies are engaging with AI, and there was a renewed conviction that citizens must actively participate in shaping AI's role in democratic life. The session recommended capacity-building, greater local-government transparency on AI, and community-led initiatives to strengthen democratic resilience.

COMMON CAUSE GROUPS

GLOBAL PRIORITIES FOR INITIATIVES OF CHANGE

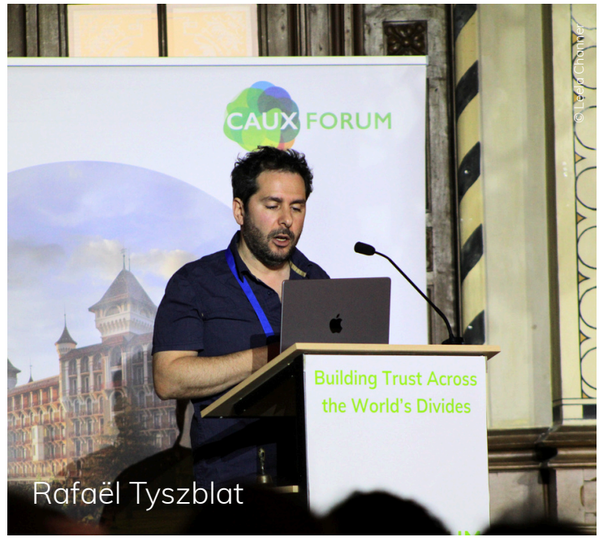
With: Severine Chavanne (France), Daya Bhagwandas (Australia), Guled Osman (Somalia), Peter Rundell (UK).

The group emphasized the importance of focus to achieve global strategic impact. Key global threats include polarisation and exclusion – forces that enable authoritarianism and undermine democracy. Instead they propose an overarching theme: “togethering”.

Connecting teams across the network through a structured mapping exercise will help capture current achievements, constraints, and aspirations. Additionally, IofC’s training materials should be synthesized and expanded to equip activists with both life-changing and world-changing skills.

The response must be rooted in IofC’s core: moral standards and inner listening for guidance.





MIDDLE EAST CONFLICTS – PERSPECTIVES FROM FRANCE

Reporting back on the roundtables organised by IofC France, mediator Rafaël Tyszblat offered a thoughtful synthesis.

Acknowledging the emotional intensity and imbalance in narratives, he stressed that peace cannot ignore justice, nor justice disregard human dignity. While many contributions leaned toward the Palestinian perspective, he emphasized the importance of respectful, self-critical dialogue.

Drawing from decades of experience, he affirmed the need for intra-community dialogue and inclusive, action-oriented engagement to keep listening, even when it hurts.

“Dialogue is not neutral. It must confront power dynamics while building trust.”

Read more

ARMENIAN–KURDISH–TURKISH PEACE INITIATIVE

"You don’t start building a bridge from the middle."

This initiative, organised by Arshalouys Tenbelian (Lebanon) from the Armenian-Kurdish-Turkish Peace Initiative, centered on truth-telling and healing intergenerational trauma, supported by grassroots connections.

A moving voice note from a Turkish participant told of his journey from denial to acknowledgment of the Armenian Genocide, a powerful reminder of the role of history in personal and collective transformation.

CAUX ROUND TABLE JAPAN

A delegation of 12 business leaders from Japan, coordinated by Caux Round Table Japan (CRT Japan), joined the 2025 Caux Democracy Forum. Led by Director Hiroshi Hishida, the group contributed a workshop that highlighted Asian perspectives on responsible business and democracy.

Their workshop showcased an Asian bottom-up approach to human rights due diligence, aligned with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.

Prior to the Forum, the delegation held discussions with OHCHR in Geneva, strengthening links between business practice and international standards. Their contribution underlined that respecting human rights builds trust, legitimacy, and sustainable growth, enriching global dialogue on democracy.

AFGHAN WOMEN DELEGATION

Fifteen Afghan women took part in a Creators of Peace Circle taster during the Caux Democracy Forum in Caux They had all been active in Afghan life before August 2021, as members of parliament, senators, diplomats, journalists or human rights activists, and all but one were now in exile.
They reflected the diversity, divisions and pain of their homeland.

"Silence is not absence. Afghan women are still resisting."

The group met for three two-hour sessions inspired by Creators of Peace. At the end, they spoke of the ‘magic’ which had enabled them to see that their common cause was stronger than their differences and they hope to return to Caux.



REIMAGINING DEMOCRACY(IES) - 6-12 JULY

CREATIVE LEADERSHIP YOUTH PROGRAMME

"I restored trust in myself," one of the Reimagining Democracy(ies) participants shared during the closing of the Identity and Power session, realising how systems, structures, and power shape our daily lives and perceptions.

Led by Creative Leadership, the Caux Initiatives of Change team of young leaders, the programme brought 31 youth from 20 countries to explore democracy not as a fixed structure, but as a living, evolving practice rooted in trust, courage, and integrity.

As Rupali from India shared, "Democracy isn't something we arrive at. It's something we continuously build, together."

Lilan from Sri Lanka reflected on how beginning each day with inner listening and "tuning into our inner weather" grounded participants in presencing, inviting deeper conversations on identity, narratives, and power.

"Democracy isn't something we arrive at. It's something we continuously build, together."

Through storytelling, systems of thinking, art, and nature-based tools, participants explored justice, inclusion, and transformation in embodied, creative ways. "Can we create space for both individual expression and collective belonging?" Rahma from Tunisia asked.

The experience was not only thought-provoking but also deeply felt - a co-created democratic space where participants reflected, learned, and cultivated hope and agency for democratic futures. Interacting with the Caux Democracy Forum added a critical lens: unfolding justice requires power, values, dialogue, and the courage to reimagine democracy together.

Reimagining Democracy(ies) was made possible by the generous support of IofC US through youth sponsorships, communications support, and facilitation.



Reimagining Democracy(ies) Cohort 2025

YOUNG CHANGEMAKERS PROGRAMME



This year, the Caux Democracy Forum offered a dedicated programme for ten young participants aged 16 to 23.

Designed as a safe and welcoming space, it included moments of reflection, exclusive discussions with forum speakers, interview creation, and time for games and nature-based relaxation.

From the very beginning, icebreaker activities helped participants connect and quickly find familiar faces within the group.

This friendly atmosphere encouraged them to feel comfortable, share openly, and engage more deeply with the Forum's often intense discussions, while also building a strong sense of community and meaningful shared experience.



ARTS, CULTURE AND COMMUNITY

The Caux Democracy Forum featured a vibrant artistic programme that showcased the power of culture in promoting dialogue and peace.

Jazz at the Caux Palace

A highlight was the jazz concert by Licia Chery, held in partnership with the Montreux Jazz Artists Foundation, which opened the Forum on an inspiring note.

Exhibitions

Three exhibitions anchored the cultural programme.



Nuclear Cries Through Innocent Eyes

Moving drawings by Marshallese children about the impact of nuclear testing on their communities.

Democracy? What democracy?!

Bold political cartoons by artists Godfrey Mwampembwa (Gado) from Kenya, and Nadia Khiari (Willis from Tunis) from Tunisia, prompting reflection on democracy and freedom of expression. As Gado noted, “It’s a real power that we have – (as press cartoonists) we say things that others cannot express. We must know how to use it wisely”.

Dialogues on Humanity

Produced thanks to a partership between Photo Elysée, the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affaires and the ICRC, this exhibition explored humanitarian values through photography.

Workshops, conversations with the Young Change Makers programme and guided visits of the Caux Palace deepened engagement with the exhibits.

Participants’ talents were also celebrated during the traditional "Talent Night – Caux has talent", a closing evening for creative expression.





Lycia Cherry



Godfrey Mwampembwa (Gado)



© Orjan Ellingvag

CAUX PEACE PARK INITIATIVE

During the Caux Democracy Forum, in the presence of Montreux Mayor Olivier Gfeller, IIPT Executive Director Andreas Larentzakis, and Caux Initiatives of Change President Jacqueline Coté, Caux was officially dedicated as a Peace Park.

This marked the inclusion of the Caux Palace and its grounds in the International Institute for Peace through Tourism (IIPT)'s global network of 450 peace parks.

This recognition underscores the Caux Palace as both a symbolic and practical space for fostering peace, honouring cultural and historical heritage, and promoting responsible tourism and sustainability.

CARRYING THE FORUM FORWARD

BRINGING PEOPLE TOGETHER THROUGH COLLECTIVE EXPLORATION AND THE ARTS

The Caux Democracy Forum 2025 offered a space where more than 350 participants from diverse contexts could engage with the urgent question of how to revitalize democracy in fragile times. Grounded in the shared values of One Humanity, Integrity, Trust, Courage, and Hope, the Forum created room for storytelling, dialogue, artistic expression, and critical reflection.


© Orjan Ellingvar

FIRST-HAND EXPERIENCES FROM DIVERSE VOICES

Participants underlined both the richness of the exchange during the sessions and workshops but importantly also within the community groups and during the tea breaks and mealtimes. Survey feedback showed a strong sense of connection, appreciation for the diversity of voices, the safe space and the individual commitments to continue the conversations beyond Caux.

Several participants also expressed a need for deeper follow-up and for practical tools that can be sustained and applied in their own contexts. Training elements, for instance, were visible in the Reimagining Democracy(ies) programme and Young Changemakers, which offered concrete facilitation tools, storytelling practices, and methods for conflict transformation.

Many participants reported leaving with new approaches and practical tools to apply in their communities, from nonviolent action to trust-building approaches. The survey indicated a high level of satisfaction with the usefulness of these skills, and several participants made personal commitments to adapt the approaches in their own contexts.

Some of the material presented during the workshops are available on-line (links to be found page 23 and 26).

FOSTERING LEARNING THROUGH INNOVATION AND PRACTICE

The Forum's participatory formats (Common Cause Groups, thematic tracks, youth programmes) created safe spaces where participants reflected on values to revitalise Democracy as well as approaches to healing and reconciliation, societal cohesion, and sustainable economies.

Survey participants expressed satisfaction with the interactive methodology, the space for quiet time and the daily greetings with the Sacred Fire ceremony and closings with the evening Taizé songs. Participants praised the balance between reflection and practical application.

CREATING OPPORTUNITIES FOR FOLLOW-UP WITHIN THE CAUX DEMOCRACY PROGRAMME

To build on this momentum, participants were invited to reconvene online on 15 September 2025, the International Day of Democracy, for three Zoom sessions designed to reconnect, share experiences since Caux, and to explore future opportunities with the Democracy Programme.

In addition, a debate on AI and democracy will take place in Geneva during Democracy Week on 10 October 2025, offering another opportunity to link reflections in Caux to the international stage. Further work initiatives are being explored, particularly with some of the Common Cause Groups. Partnering remains central to the Caux Initiatives of Change strategy, with several follow-up opportunities under consideration to sustain and expand the dynamics generated by the Caux Democracy Forum.

Looking further ahead, the next Caux Democracy Forum will be held from 22–26 June 2026, beginning with an opening ceremony at the Maison de la Paix in Geneva. Registrations will open before the end of 2025.



© Olivia Chollet

COLLABORATION WITH ORGANIZATIONS

The Forum welcomed delegations and initiatives from across the Initiatives of Change network (France, Japan, South Korea, US, South Sudan, Central America…), strong country delegations (from Afghanistan, Ukraine, Russia…) and collaboration such as with OHCHR, the Swiss Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Council of Europe, ICRC, Tournons La Page, the International Institute for Peace through Tourism (launch of the Caux Peace Park), Freedom Cartoonists, the Montreux Jazz Artists Foundation, Photo Elysée…

These collaborations broadened the Forum's reach and deepened its credibility as a convening hub for democratic renewal. Participants expressed commitment to pursue collaboration, and survey responses highlighted the networking opportunities as a major strength.

Building on the success of the Reimagining Democracy(ies) 8-day Creative Leadership youth programme, the active role of young people in session moderation, and the Young Changemakers initiative, efforts will be made to further encourage younger generations to participate in and help shape the lead-up to the next Caux Democracy Forum.

These steps aim to ensure that the Forum is not only a gathering in time, but part of a longer journey: a living platform for dialogue, collaboration, and learning where participants can stay engaged, test ideas, and carry forward shared commitments in their own communities and institutions.

Thanks to the solidarity of individual sponsors, IofC bodies as well of philanthropic Foundations, participants from less affluent economies, youth, and those with limited means were able to join. This support helps ensure diversity of voices and strengthened the Forum's spirit of inclusion.

The work of democracy does not end in Caux. It continues in every dialogue, every partnership, and every act of courage we, as participants in the Caux Democracy Forum, carry back to our communities. It also lives in our responsibility to align values with action and in the urgency to respond, together, to the challenges of our time.

SAVE THE DATE

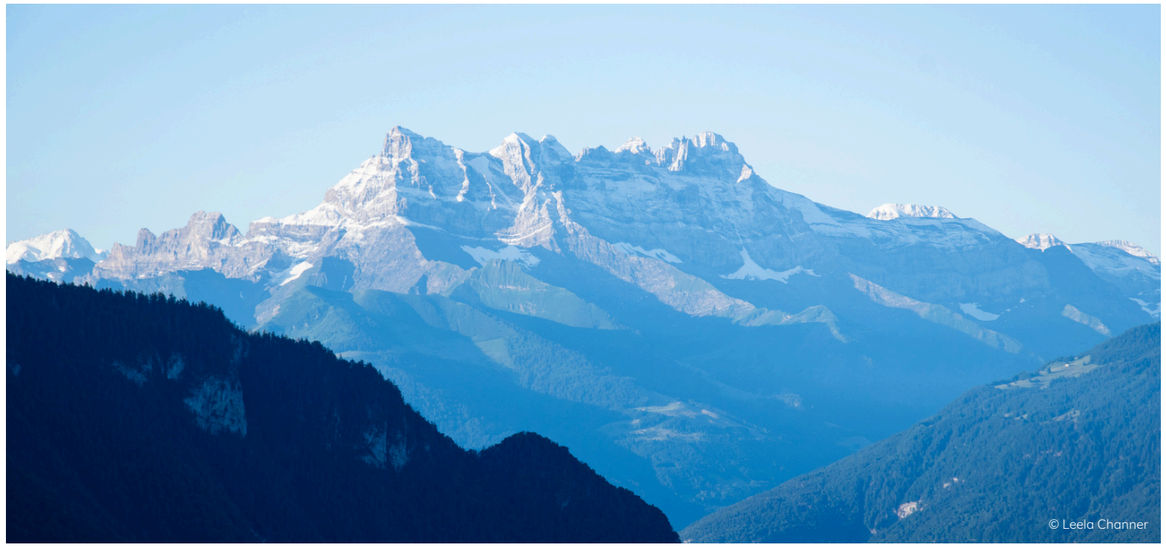
CAUX DEMOCRACY FORUM 2026
22-26 JUNE


© Leela Channer

THE CAUX DEMOCRACY FORUM IN FIGURES

GENERAL	
Participants Full Forum (1)	278
Day Participants	70
Early-Bird Registrations	37%
Number of nationalities (2)	47
First time in Caux	18%

(1) CDF - This includes the Reimagining Democray(ies) Youth Programme
(2) Total nationalities between both CDF and IDG Forum : 64
(3) % of participants (excluding day participants)



DEMOGRAPHY	
Gender Balance (% women)	56%
Under 25 (3)	15%
Between 25 and 40 (3)	24%
Between 41 and 60 (3)	27%
> 60 (3)	29%

SATISFACTION SURVEY RESULT	
Response rate	25%
Recommend Forum to others	98%
Enhances understanding (average on max 5 points)	4.21
Ideas for action	98%
Meeting expectations (5 points)	4.41
Confident in applying learnings	Very confident : 50% Somewhat confident : 47% Not confident : 3%

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This collective effort exemplifies the spirit of ”One Humanity” that underpins Caux Initiatives of Change.

Initiatives of Change

In partnership with:

UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER

Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun svizra

Federal Department of Foreign Affairs FDFA

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OUR PARTNERS

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