

FIRST STEP FORUM

Engages New Situations, New Challenges and New Solutions

After serving WEA and the global church for almost ten years and visiting some 100 nations, I became more and more aware of the weaknesses we Evangelicals have. Unless we are brave enough to see them and to deal with them, we do not really need an enemy; we will be our own worst enemy and we will not be the agent for change God wants us to be. I found four major weaknesses in the global Evangelical community:

1. We are a divided community worldwide
2. We are re-active, not pro-active
3. We have a tendency to see enemies instead of possible partners
4. We do not give high value to Christians outside the "Evangelical circle"

Let us look in the mirror

If we do not deal with these issues, we will not be able to play the unique, relevant role in the world that I believe God has given to us. We could change the world if Evangelicals would take each other's hand to



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form a chain that would go around the globe several times!! My dream was, therefore, to form an independent network that would unite professional leaders on a world level, to act proactively to build bridges, to find new partners outside our Christian circles, and to include and give value to other Christians. Based on the Chinese saying, "A journey of one thousand miles starts with one first step," I called the group First Step Forum. The vision is to anticipate upcoming conflicts as they brew and be the first to see, the first to understand and the first to act. But we want to act in a Christ-like, non-confrontational way to seek a way to be a blessing to nations, all people groups, and individuals. The Forum's capacity to raise and release financial resources that could invest up to US\$500 million gives the Forum a new, unique position to meet with governments.

Who are we then?

Today the Forum includes three Former Prime Ministers (Kjell-Magne Bondevik, Norway, Jerzy Buzek, Poland and Mart Laar, Estonia) a former Foreign Minister (Brizuela de Avila, El Salvador), a former Under Secretary of State (David Kilgour, Canada), US Ambassador Bob Seiple and former Ambassador Slavi Pachovski, Bulgaria, and members of Parliaments in many nations. We have legal, media and business investment experts all working together to build bridges, mainly to the Muslim world. As the Muslim world is by far the biggest challenge in the future, it is very significant that we will have a Christian Ambassador from a Muslim nation (Ambassador Dennis Igantius, Malaysia's Ambassador to Canada) working with us starting this August.

It is a great joy that both Protestant and Catholic Christians can work together in

the Forum as followers of Jesus Christ. The Forum is now recognized by many world leaders. Says former American President Bill Clinton, "Thank you for what you are doing. Together we can build a brighter, more prosperous, and more peaceful world." An Ambassador for Iran says, "The Forum plays an important role as a bridge between the West and the Muslim countries." Says the late Benazir Bhutto, "The Forum has played a critical role in helping women from the Muslim world." It needs to be said that the Forum is independent from WEA but, works together with WEA on an ad hoc basis.

What do we do?

The Forum has worked with the government of Turkey to help Protestant churches acquire legal registration, but has also advocated for Muslims religious liberty in Greece, given training for Muslim and Christian journalists together in Nigeria (invited by a Muslim governor), built democracy networks and leadership training material with the late Benazir Bhutto from Pakistan, worked on a solution to the Sahara conflict, and advocated on behalf of Christian refugees from Iraq in Turkey. We have also been working with the government of Syria to establish a dialogue with the West. At the same time, we have brought in investors to create employment opportunities in many nations so that people would not have to emigrate from their home countries. In several nations where Evangelicals are under stress, we have helped their leaders to meet face to face with the government and explain their needs.

Why do we do it?

When we look in the mirror, we see the reflection of our face. When we look into the face of suffering brothers and sisters, we

see a reflection of our heart. Should we act? I believe that we live in a new situation with new challenges today, but also new solutions. There is much more goodwill than we can dream of if we start to see non-Evangelicals as possible partners. The reason FSF wants to work for a better tomorrow is that every human being has the right to human dignity as a creation of God. Another reason is that we are called by God to be good stewards of



this world. We have the mission to love all our neighbours. We live now in a world that is crying out for new initiatives rooted in the love of Jesus Christ. I believe that the situation is ready for many new initiatives taken by Evangelical Christians and other Christians. As Victor Hugo said long ago, "There is nothing as powerful as an idea whose time has come." First Step Forum is just one of many ideas. But at its best, it might be what just what it is called, a first step. <<