
Current Concerns

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Continuing Henry Dunant's Work

Solemn opening ceremony of the "Dunant Year 2010"

by Urs Knoblauch, cultural journalist, Switzerland

Commemorating the centenary of the Red Cross founding father and on the occasion of the opening ceremony of the "Dunant year 2010", the sun was shining over the richly decorated Heiden health resort in the Swiss canton of Appenzell, just above Lake Constance. It was the place where the almost forgotten Henry Dunant spent the last 23 years of his life. Children, young people and schools were the special addressees of the celebrations on the centenary of his death. They intended to continue Dunant's concerns "humanity, solidarity and civil courage". In a cooperative effort, the commune organized extraordinary events, which attract numerous visitors and school groups. The opening ceremony on Sunday, 8 May, was well-attended.

On the occasion of the various opening ceremonies, the Häädler school children and young people designed beautiful flags decorated with peace subjects and texts. They were waving as welcome in the health resort gardens above the "peace tables" designed by H. R. Fricker. Along the road, the numerous visitors could see a wide variety of stalls with a quaint selection of products. The children served a peace soup, sold peace cookies or acted out scenes about the Red Cross principles "Humanity, solidarity and civil courage" or sang songs about them in a choir with a hundred students. An art auction with over 300 red crosses, painted by a variety of people, was also held. Quickly, many pictures were sold, especially those by prominent painters. The proper ceremony took place in the recently renovated and crowded entertainment hall. In his greeting address, the current communal president, Norbert Näf, rightly expressed his great pride about the success of the projects. He stressed that the Dunant year will not consist "of many media bang effects, but of projects and activities that are largely oriented towards sustainability". Thus, "according to the value oriented program" school classes will be invited to Heiden in the coming years. His words were followed by the impressive speech of Landamman Jakob Brunnschweiler. (see following article). Then, as a special guest, Dr Jakob Kellenberger, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, (ICRC) was welcomed. Kellenberger was born in the same house – the district hospital of Heiden – in which Henry Dunant, the Red Cross founder, had died. This building, which is well worth seeing, houses the Dunant museum today. In his profound speech, Jakob Kellenberger traced the most important stages of Henry Dunant's life, his vision of an "international aid community" and the restless dedication "for the good cause". The speech is fully reproduced below. The school of dulcimer's youth group beautifully accompanied the ceremony. Likewise, a Swiss official commemorative coin in honor of Dunant was unveiled. Thus, the celebration became a pleasant event, which well represented Dunant's concerns. The whole community had designed every detail of the ceremony with great care. Thus, children and young people keep the values of Henry Dunant and the Red Cross alive and spread them in an unconventional manner. A visit to the existing and upcoming events in Heiden can only be recommended. •

For more information www.dunant2010.ch

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