Set in the beautiful pristine hill station of Panchgani and hosted by Asia Plateau, seventeen young scholars from eleven different countries started their journey up the mountain of self-discovery on their path to recognize their potential as young leaders of their communities. Guided by a team of excellent facilitators and their inner voice and inner governance, scholars build a circle of trust and deep bonds of friendship.

“The journey at Asia Plateau began on an upbeat note with a traditional Indian ceremony of lighting a lamp to symbolize the spark of knowledge in each scholar participating in this three-week experience of learning about peacebuilding and conflict transformation. The scholars were given a warm welcome and introduced to the wider community at Asia Plateau.”

-Chintan, India

The first part of the program focused on examining complex theoretical concepts of identity, conflict resolution, peacebuilding, power dynamics, sustainable development, leadership and various theories and tools of conflict analysis and how one’s understanding of identities influences his/her work as a peace builder. Facilitators - Dr. Sripракash Mayasandra (Sri), Dr. Patrick McNamara, Dr. Florina Benoit, and Dr. Gladston Xavier (Ashok) - weaved in various group activities, exercises, and discussions into their lectures. One scholar articulated how the role-plays and small group discussions helped him to understand the theories and frameworks in a better way.
Scholars immersed themselves in the ocean of knowledge both inside and outside of the classroom. The field visits to local villages: Pachputewadi, Dhanauli, and another nearby village, organized by Grampari, allowed the scholars to observe how concepts of conflict transformation, peacebuilding, sustainable development, and inner governance came together in practice. They provided excellent examples of sustainable development and capacity building in local communities. Moreover, scholars learned the importance of understanding the “other” and being sensitive and acutely aware of one’s position when doing peacebuilding work.

From meeting and listening to Dr. Rajmohan Gandhi and his wife Usha speak about their inspiring work to hearing stories of how conflict at work had been resolved from Dr. Ravi Rao and Kiran Gandhi, the scholars profited from opportunities to hear from the residents at AP about peacebuilding and conflict transformation. Other guest facilitators from the AP community included: Sudhir Gogate, who shared his personal story of loss and triumph; Dilip Patel gave students the benefit of his expertise on principles, values, and beliefs; Arshaluys Mushkambaryan, who addressed the subject of media’s role in peacebuilding; and Mrs. Malithi who expressed her passion and commitment to Mother Earth – urging care for our environment.

“A highlight for me was the meeting with Mr. Sudhir Gogate. It was really an inspiring meeting and I experienced lots of contradicting and challenging emotions that made me think of many life issues in a new way.”
–Tatev, Armenia

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As the rural initiative of IofC, Grampari envisions a just and sustainable society for all and works to create this vision by building the capacity of rural society through thoughtful, innovative and community led programs in livelihoods, health and environment, empowerment and local governance.

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“The spring water project demonstrated a perfect collaboration between local community and a third party outsider, like Grampari, and knowing in what ways to be involved and how much to be involved so as to give ownership to the locals.”
–Pravin, India

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Led by facilitators Florina and Ashok, in a circle of trust, scholars shared his/her trauma story and began the healing process. This experience brought the scholars even closer as a family. Sri’s lesson on restorative justice and journey of reconciliation provided a final and powerful message of conflict that is transformed and healed, thus, bringing the program to a close.

The presentations of Conflict Where I Come From (CWICF) provided scholars with an opportunity to learn from each other about different conflicts. Throughout the three weeks, the scholars presented their CWICF using the frameworks and tools of conflict analysis. This allowed the scholars to put their knowledge into action as each prepared for his/her presentation. During the last few days, scholars worked in pairs and individually to come up with a solution, or possible action plans/activities, to address the conflict. Using various different analytical frameworks and conflict analysis tools, the scholars presented their projects. The CWICF and the project presentations were great learning tools for the scholars.

In the spirit of IofC’s mission, scholars had several opportunities to participate in several morning sessions of quiet, led by Archana Rao, Leena and Suresh Khatri, and Zooni Dash. The early morning quiet session and reflections nurtured the souls and minds of the scholars as they listened to their inner voices and sought guidance. In addition to theoretical and practical lectures on the importance of inner peace, the practice of seeking it through quiet hour helped scholars to listen to their inner voice and nurture their souls.

“The sessions of inner listening and inner governance and listening to the stories of other fellows made me thoughtful, as well as understand issues around the world. I was able to connect the stories and learning with my work and community back home which helped me a lot to understand peace and conflict better.”
–Bijaya, Nepal

“I realized that though we are different, but we are the same in many aspects, in terms of the problems we face in our countries…“
–Eman, Egypt

In between the two parts of the program, scholars had a short two days of break. A hike up an historic fort of Pratapgarh and a stroll along the colorful markets of Mahabaleshwar provided an outdoor classroom where scholars got a glimpse of Indian history and culture.
The most powerful of all the experiences was the coming down of the mountain, where each scholar shared his/her dreams, aspirations, as well as hopes and fears. The CSP-AP ended with a beautiful closing ceremony organized by the scholars themselves. Incorporating songs of peace, love, hope, and a silent theatrical art performance, the scholars showcased the knowledge they have gained in the past three weeks.

All this would not have been possible without an excellent team of faculty. With many years of experience working as a peace builder through Mennonite Central Committee, Sri did an excellent job of pulling the threads together. Going above and beyond the call of duty, he guided the scholars and faculty as an exceptional leader, protected the scholars as a parent, and participated with them as a friend. His contributions, along with those of Patrick, Florina, and Ashok have been truly a gift to the Caux Scholars Program. For the scholars, the faculty has been more than facilitators and mentors: Sri as a guardian, Patrick as a trusted friend, and Florina and Ashok as caring and loving parents. The success of CSP-AP’s first year is attributable to the dedication of such an amazing team.

The three weeks have been an amazing journey for the scholars creating a beautiful and special bond of friendship. With bitter and sweet goodbyes, scholars slowly descended down the mountain of Panchgani and went back to where they came from, each one a changed person taking a little of Caux spirit and that of Asia Plateau. For each scholar, a door to a new world and new possibilities has been opened.

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