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Postcard

Vancouver, Capital of Peace

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Vancouver is not just the city hosting the 2010 Winter Olympics, and not just the agglomeration forming British Colombia's economic centre on Canada's west coast. It is also the city which hosted in June 2006 the World Peace Forum.

Memories, memories.

Vancouver, June 2006. A splendid city on the delta of the Fraser River, between the ocean and the mountains (in early July there was still some snow on the nearby peaks), Vancouver has over 550 000 inhabitants and the whole agglomeration (some 20 municipalities) exceeds 2 million. The "downtown" consists of skyscrapers standing on a peninsula served by three bridges. The surrounding districts stretch to the north, south and east with small blocks of flats and more or less affluent houses, generally adorned by greenery - in the west are the Pacific waters where seals and whales frolic. If any city can give the impression of being built in a natural environment, Vancouver can. There are even grizzly bears in the mountains overlooking the city.

It is also an important port, and a dynamic, cosmopolitan city with 30% of its population being immigrants, mostly naturalised Canadian citizens (Canada allows double nationality). Two thirds of these are Asian: Indian, Filipino, and especially Chinese (notably exiles who left Hong Kong when it was reintegrated into Communist China). The others have varied origins: Latin American, Italian, Iranian... even French. They understand each other and are well integrated (everyone speaks English). Thanks to economic growth, there is little delinquency. When questioned, all these "recent add-ons" say how happy they are to be living in Vancouver.

In 2006, from June 23 to 28, nearly 5000 participants from round the world attended the World Peace Forum, the first of its kind. The University of British Colombia (UBC) welcomed it, on a campus resembling a huge natural park where maples stand beside red cedars. The Museum of Anthropology is there too, with impressive totem-poles of the Haida Indians (better known as Cheyennes, a name taken by some of their tribes when they went south to the US in 1840 after some volcanic eruptions).

The idea of the World Peace Forum had formed three years earlier in this city which belonged to the "Cities for Peace". Those planning it, a determined team, struck financial difficulties when city elections produced a new majority that cancelled the city's subsidy - and later reinstated it in the face of thousands of protests. Jeff Keighton, one of key people in this team of many volunteers, estimates the Forum's overall budget at 1.3 million Canadian dollars (over 900 000 Euros at 2006 values) - a sum provided essentially by contributions from the participants (registration fees and gifts).

With nearly 5000 participants and numerous exchanges, this collective effort was undoubtedly a success, and the wish was expressed to renew the experience in 2008 in another city in another country.

JMM

...Alas, four years have passed and nobody had picked up the torch. You lovers of peace, here's an opportunity for you to grasp!

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