

## European FOR Branches in Alkmaar

by Stan Morris  
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On the sunny Friday of 4 April, 2008 forty members from European branches of the Fellowship of Reconciliation (E-FOR) and invited guests arrived at the Fellowship's International Secretariat (IFOR) in Alkmaar, NL for the opening session of a three day event. The annual E-FOR conference was organized by convenor and Chairperson Eva Füssinger, RCC convenor Marion Schreiber and Abe Thijs and Bertram Flesch from IFOR branch Kerk en Vrede.

After coffee, tea and a "lekkere" lunch hosted by the IFOR staff, President Jan Schaake introduced IFOR's new Executive Director John Schot. Arjan Dekker (Finance Administrator), Isabelle Geuskens (Program Manager WPP), Cristina Reyna (WPP Gender Officer) and Stan Morris (Communications Officer), then gave presentations on their recent activities at the International Secretariat and Women Peacemakers Program.



Jan Schaake opens the E-FOR meeting in Alkmaar, NL.

Reporting next on work-in-progress and other activities at their respective branches was Marion Schreiber (Versöhnungsbund, Austria), Benoît Thiran (Sortir de la Violence, Belgium), Chris Cole (FOR England), Maria Biedrawa (MIR France), Uli Sonn and Miriam Klemm (Versöhnungsbund, Germany), Paolo Candelari and Maria Antonietta Maleo (MIR Italia), Henk Blom (Doopsgezind Wereldwerk, Netherlands), Abe Thijs (Kerk en Vrede, Netherlands), Heidi and Jorgen Andersen (FOR Norway), David Mumford (FOR Scotland), Axel Ruhe (FOR Sweden), Dave d'Albert and Eva Füssinger (Forum für Friedenserziehung, Switzerland), George Kobi and Françoise Pétremand (MIR Romand, Switzerland) and Arfon Rhys (FOR Wales). Later Ewa Roman and Elisabeth Zochowska (Fundacja Ekumeniczna "Tolerancja," Poland) presented an overview of their organization, a prospective IFOR member under consideration, and talked about their hopes for the future in continuing to build on their new relationship with the IFOR family.

As evening approached, the group walked several blocks to the historic Alkmaar Doopgezinde Kerk (Mennonite Church) to attend a dinner hosted by church members and a presentation by Rev. Harcourt (Harky) Kleinfelder in commemoration of the 40th anniversary of the death of Martin Luther King. Harky was Dr. King's press officer (Assistant Director of Public Relations) in the sixties, and he was debuting a new DVD about the life and work of Dr. King, as it relates to the significance of the nonviolent movement in the Netherlands and Europe. Since the seventies, Harky has been working as a Doopsgezinde (Mennonite) minister and nonviolent trainer in the Netherlands, and thereby involved in nonviolent approaches to many conflicts elsewhere in Europe.



John Schot talking with Eva Füssinger, IFOR office kitchen.

Upon arriving at Doopgezinde Kerk we were greeted by event organizer Annelies Klinefelter (Harky's wife) and served a wonderful buffet prepared by Doopgezinde Kerk members and members of the Klinefelter family. The month before Annelies had asked me, as Communications Officer at the IFOR office, to help her in getting the word out on the MLK event to all our Dutch contacts. Standing next to her in the back of the room during the documentary, whispering comments back and forth, I concluded that she and Harky are truly courageous peace advocates—just imagine being “white” in those early, tumultuous days’ of the U.S. Civil Rights Movement and marching along side Dr. King and company.

Harky, a young college student in the U.S and “looking for a summer project,” began working with Dr. King during the first of Dr. King’s freedom marches. Harky and Annelies have been associated with IFOR for many years; and I found their history quite amazing. Harky said Dr. King didn’t have any recording equipment at the time, but Harky did. So, Dr. King allowed Harky to tag along. By the end of the summer, Dr. King was so impressed with Harky that he hired him as a full-time staff member. The DVD documentary was produced by a student of Harky’s, filmed in Friesland near Harky and Annelies’ home, and jumps between original clips of Dr. King’s marches and Harky sitting in his camper recounting his experiences of those riveting, revolutionary times.



Abe Thijs, Isabelle Geuskens and José de Vries.

Martin Luther King was in the sixties a prominent member of the United States’ branch of the International Fellowship of Reconciliation. At the invitation of IFOR’s active branch Kerk en Vrede, representatives from the European FOR branches gathered that night to relate the significance of the message of Martin Luther King and other people who have inspired nonviolent movements in relation to the present situation in Europe.

Commemorative CDs of the documentary were given to five special guests at the end of the evening; our own Jan Schaake being among them. After more coffee, tea, wine and some delicious desserts, our entourage said their goodbyes and thanked the Klinefelter family and the Doopgezinde Kerk for an inspiring and educational evening. Most of those attending the European FOR conference then left directly for the Doopsgezind Broederschapshuis location in Schoorl, where they stayed for the remainder of the conference.

Doopsgezind Broederschapshuis is a Mennonite guest house, “large and cozy buildings set against the dunes and woods of Schoorl,” and also near Alkmaar. It is used for big groups, with two large meeting rooms, where the European FOR Conference met, and several other thick thatched-roof houses spread out on the grounds for overnight guests. The grounds are located right against the Holland dunes, just a few kilometers from the ocean. During a lunch break Benoît Thiran, George Kobi and I hiked to the top of the dunes. These sand dunes are ancient and run along the west coast of the Netherlands almost the entire length. They are also one of the reasons, in conjunction with incredible Dutch hydro-mechanics that North and South Holland stay above the waterline.

*De Doopgezinde Kerk in Alkmaar is located at Koningsweg 12 in the center of Alkmaar <http://www.alkmaar.nl/monument/monument/doopkerk.htm>, and more information on IFOR’s branch Kerk en Vrede (Church and Peace) can be found at [www.kerkenvrede.nl](http://www.kerkenvrede.nl). Photos: [http://ifor.org/articles/Reports/E-FOR\\_photos.pdf](http://ifor.org/articles/Reports/E-FOR_photos.pdf).*