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“NOBEL PEACE CENTER, OSLO”

In a few weeks, a major new peace museum will be opened in Oslo: the Nobel Peace Center. In fact, because of the urgent work associated with its impending opening, our good friend and colleague from the Norwegian Nobel Institute, Anne C. Kjelling, who has participated in the four previous conferences of the International Network of Peace Museums, regrettably is being prevented from joining us here in Gernika and report on the new Center. However, she has kindly made available for conference participants an attractive brochure which briefly describes the Center (How can we contribute to peace? Welcome to the Nobel Peace Center, opening in Oslo on 11 June 2005!).

It may be surprising to learn that it has taken so long for such a Center to be established in the city where, since 1901, the Nobel peace prize has been awarded. Visitors to the Norwegian capital interested in this subject could of course visit the Norwegian Nobel Institute in the city centre and admire the elegant building. Inside, the visitor would see the famous library, and when lucky also the room where the Norwegian Nobel Committee meets, surrounded by the official portraits of all the peace laureates.

Together, these laureates - whether individuals or institutions - provide an impressive record of the peace ideas, efforts, and achievements of the 20th century and the early years of the 21st century. Anyone who is interested in the recent history of peace, and in the question of what it means to be a peacemaker, will find in the collective biographies of the laureates an excellent, and inspiring, introduction.

In order to document their lives and activities in an attractive manner for a wide public, there were expectations during the concluding years of the 20th century that a Nobel Peace Prize Museum would open its doors in 2001, as part of the celebrations of the centenary of the prize. However, such hopes proved to be premature, and the long-expected public visitor institution will now be opened on 11th June. This year, 2005, sees another important anniversary since it was in 1905 that the peaceful separation of Norway and Sweden came about. The opening of the Nobel Peace Center is therefore part of the celebrations in Norway marking the 100th anniversary of Norwegian independence. The presence of the monarchs and prime ministers of both countries during the opening ceremony is indicative of the high profile of the new Center.

Its realisation has been made possible through the cooperation with the Norwegian Nobel Committee of the Norwegian government which in 2000 decided to make the historical railway station located in the heart of the city available to the Committee. The government also provided for the restoration of the building and its transformation into a Nobel Peace Center. Conceived

initially as a Peace Prize Museum, references to 'Museum' and 'Prize' were subsequently abandoned, and a more general name, the Nobel Peace Center, was adopted. This reflects the fact that, early on, it was decided that no traditional museum with artefacts was envisaged, but a different kind of facility. Also, it was agreed that its scope should not be confined to the peace prize laureates but should also encompass wider issues concerning peace and conflict today.

The Center has chosen for an artistic interpretation of its subject, and for communicating the message of peace in a new way. Given the resources and expertise at the disposal of the Center, and also given the worldwide prestige of the Nobel peace prize, the world is entitled to look forward to a first-class, inspiring and empowering new kind of peace museum (much as some of us may regret the absence of traditional artefacts. In this respect, the Center seems to have ignored one of the key insights of Johan Galtung, the Norwegian founding father of modern peace research and conflict resolution, who argues that often the best way forward is not to think in terms of 'either/or', but rather adopt a more comprehensive and inclusive 'and/and'). No doubt, several peace museum directors and peace educators present here will be looking forward to an early opportunity to visit the Center.

Just as the world continues to be inspired by the Nobel peace laureates, there are good reasons to hope that the world of peace museums will be inspired by the Nobel Peace Center. And, if we are lucky, it could well be that one day Oslo will be the venue for one of next conferences of the International Network of Peace Museums.