

## CAGI News

# The International Geneva Welcome Centre (CAGI) assists and supports NGOs in Geneva



The role of non-State actors, including NGOs, in international relations is increasing – so is the number of NGOs present in Geneva. Over the last 5 years alone, more than 50 foreign-based NGOs opened a representative office in Geneva in order to foster collaboration with the numerous international Geneva actors. We asked the representative of two of them to share with us a few thoughts about this inception phase.

### The International Chamber of Commerce and the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung recently opened a representation office in Geneva, can you tell us why?

**Crispin Conroy\***: The International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) is the institutional representative of over 45 million companies, in over 100 countries. Our mission is to make business work for everyone, every day, everywhere. In May 2019, ICC adopted a Centenary Declaration that outlined ICC's renewed purpose to enable business worldwide to secure peace, prosperity and opportunity for all. In this context, the ICC decided that it was important to establish a presence in Geneva, one of the great multilateral cities of the world, and one of the main United Nations hubs, as well as being home to the World Trade Organisation and the World Intellectual Property Organisation, to complement the work of the ICC UN New York Permanent Observer Mission. Having a presence in Geneva has certainly contributed to ICC's leadership role in the private sector response to the COVID-19 crisis, for example, through our important and ongoing collaboration with WHO and WTO.

**Aleks Jahn\*\***: Geneva is the world's largest UN location and therefore also the headquarters of many international civil society organisations and institutions, which makes it a very important location for us – alongside New York, where our other UN office is located – to work on UN issues. What we are trying

to do in Geneva with our programs on international labour organisations and social rights is to shed light on processes taking place at international level but also in other Geneva-based associations and civil society networks around these thematic areas. Secondly, we aim to draw attention to developments in the area of labour rights and social rights worldwide and in particular to the situation of particularly disadvantaged groups in the Global South. The aim of our work is the globalisation of rights (also in contrast to the already existing globalisation of capital) and to renew commitments to international solidarity and multilateralism, which is particularly important in times of crisis.

### How did the installation process go (honestly!)? What did it imply?

**Crispin Conroy**: The installation process has been incredibly smooth, and I am very grateful for the support of CAGI, the Swiss Permanent Mission, CCIG and its Director General, Vincent Subilia and ICC Switzerland and its Secretary General, Thomas Pletscher, and IFPMA.

**Aleks Jahn**: As an NGO with 27 offices on four continents, we were aware that the establishment of an office in an international context is always associated with



Crispin Conroy.

challenges. Nevertheless, some points have revealed greater problems than we had expected in the run-up to our opening in Geneva. Essential issues such as choosing the appropriate legal form for our local office, the selection and obtaining of the appropriate type of work permit for our employees seconded to Geneva, and the opening of a local bank account proved to be particularly time-consuming and labour-intensive.

Additionally, the lockdown due to the corona crisis has been slowing down the process of opening our office. Our plan was to move into our office space in April this year, which turned out to be impossible due to the restrictions. So, after almost a year, we are still in the process of building up our office, and it is quite clear that we have to keep adjusting our plans. Nevertheless, we would like to emphasize that we have been receiving very good guidance and support here.

#### How did CAGI help in the process?

**Crispin Conroy:** I really must express my deep appreciation to CAGI, as they have really accompanied us on every step of the installation process.

**Aleks Jahn:** We are very happy that there is an institution like CAGI; it truly is unique. Even before our arrival in Geneva, we were already in touch with the people from CAGI from whom we received important information about the requirements to be met and the institutional steps to be taken to establish an office in Geneva. We also received intensive assistance from CAGI in the search for suitable office space, including submission of offers, contacts to real estate agents and arrangements of viewing appointments. Another CAGI service that we have already used several times is the NGO recruitment platform and the possibility to post jobs online.

#### What did surprise you the most positively and negatively when you moved?

**Crispin Conroy:** The installation process has been almost entirely positive, with the most notable point being the receptiveness of the Geneva multilateral and business community to deeper engagement by ICC. The only minor negative point was certain documentation delays, but – having said this – process was always well explained, with regular contact regarding delays – and strong support from CAGI.



Andrea Aleks.

**Aleks Jahn:** I find the generally very polite and respectful way in which people treat each other to be very pleasant. Although the city is comparatively small, it is very international, which of course is primarily due to the many international organisations and their staff, but also to the intensive exchange with neighbouring countries, in Geneva primarily with France. On the other hand, I was surprised by the significantly higher rents and costs of living compared to my hometown Berlin. ▶

For information on CAGI's activities see [www.cagi.ch](http://www.cagi.ch) and follow @CagiGeneva on Twitter

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\*\* Aleks Jahn is the Director of the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung Geneva Office.