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Dear friends,

Fortunately enough, there are some strong values which remain in the world so much upset of today : friendship, and the firm belief that we are many to think that "another world is possible". Remains also "*the hope that is always the strongest*". I wish you a year 2003 full of peace, love, fulfilment and joy, amidst struggles, failures and successes that we will meet on the way.

In India, we are facing many confrontations between religions and between castes, mainly due to the fact that a hindu fundamentalist party is in power. Talking about "preemptive strike", and in the name of security, the authorities trample on human rights and buy more and more sophisticated weapons. At least, on the positive side, we can keep some hope because more and more people are coming back to the traditional values of non violence, tolerance, life simplicity. Although we move full speed on the hi-tech way for which our fellow-citizens are particularly gifted, we notice also, mainly at the rural level, people coming back to traditional way of life, more ecological management of water and seeds, ayurvedic medicine, which enable some kind of local autonomy.

As a member of the Palestine AFI unit, I feel deeply within myself the suffering of the people, their daily struggle, and how the international community is unable to stop such international injustice !

And what about myself ? Often, I am facing the contradiction in the two commitments taken in my new life (pension age) :

- my wish for a simple life of silence, prayer and opening, in the peace of the village where the Lord pitched my tent 47 years ago;
- and my declaration that "now, I am available".

Anyway, I manage my programme, trying to understand the "signs" I receive ! For instance, from May to December 2002, this was my itinerary :

- Cairo and Alexandria : meeting of our AFI West Asia unit;
- Damas : where Rafah invited me to attend a seminar (psychosomatic medicine), and the occasion to discover her country;
- two stays in Belgium where now I share the open and welcoming home of Francine and Jacques (my niece and nephew) at Rosieres;
- Lima and Huaraz (Peru), Santiago, Valparaiso and Chiloé islands (Chile) where two of my nephews welcomed me. For this first visit in Latin America, they enabled me to understand a bit people's concern but also to discover the beauties of these countries;
- I made also a few trips within India, including to bid farewell to two close friends : Acharya Francis (ocso) and James Tombeur (SAM), two sincere witnesses of Love.

This year, we celebrate the birth centenary of Dr. Frans Hemerijckx. We remembered him at Polambakkam, Ninove and Grimbergen, with gratitude for all he has been in Congo (25 years) and India (10 years), not only for his patients but for all who shared his life.

At Polambakkam, a young tamilian lady, Victoria, joined me. She got involved in the existing social and educational activities and is preparing a Ph.D. thesis in sociology. She is also a precious help to welcome our guests and friends.

My AFI teammate, Huguette, from Mauritius, spent a good time with me. She was hoping to get active treatment for her eyes problems (there are renowned specialists in Madras). Unfortunately this has not been possible, but at least we could live long fraternal exchanges.

So you see why I speak of contradictory options ! Nevertheless, it has been a very enriching year.

May the Lord's hands be over you and all around you in the 2003 year !

Claire