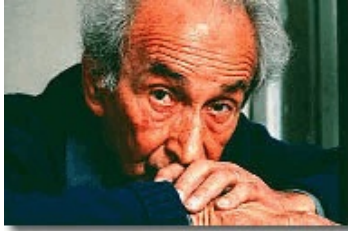


EDMUND KAISER

Edmund Kaiser was born in Paris January 2, 1914 to Jewish parents Maure and Louise Chostmann. His mother's second marriage was to Armand Kaiser in 1931; Armand was a businessman in Lausanne and also Edmund's uncle. Edmund died in Coimbatore, India at 86 on March 4, 2000. Individualistic in the extreme, opinionated and stubborn, indifferent to the social rules; either one accepted his eccentric social sensitivity or one walked away from his in-your-face approach to social awareness. Kaiser was not one to



inspire personal devotion; but he did command respect for his personal dedication and his achievement. Edmund Kaiser was a social force to be reckoned with, a man aggressively dedicated to the defense of the most vulnerable members of the human race – its children.¹ (Photo Y Muriset)

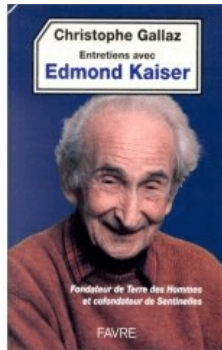
Kaiser personally first founded *Terre des hommes* (TDH) in Geneva, Switzerland and then inspired the founding of national versions of *Terre des hommes* in many other countries and finally, in a fit of pique, founded and inspired other versions of TDH in other parts of Switzerland as well. Somewhat in spite of Kaiser, the cluster of national versions founded the worldwide *International Federation of Terre des hommes* (IFTDH) from whose organization Kaiser deliberately chose to absent himself. Because of its own bylaws that insist on only one TDH per country and because of the strong influence the ideals of volunteerism and decentralized administration have played in its history, the Federation is composed today of only fifteen member organizations; but that number is somewhat misleading because most, if not all of them, have multiple dependant organizations within them. Today, in 2006, IFTDH is a widely spread organization that works on behalf of children in over 80 countries and is yearly responsible for some 800 child-oriented projects.

True to the model of their inspiring founder, in their character the many national versions of TDH follow more individualistic patterns of structure, organization and behavior according to the founding orientation perhaps unintentionally bequeathed to them by Edmund Kaiser. Unlike the huge monolithic public service organizations who do not easily tolerate the presence of visionary and dedicated individuals among their strictly organized ranks but rather insist on a greater conformity among their members, TDH has allowed highly individualistic men and woman to find a way to work out their personal aspirations to provide public service in support of the lives of children within the loose Federation that is TDH International. For that legacy as well, Kaiser deserves to be honored.

It is not so often that those who have been individualistic in their style of achievement in their lifetime are recognized in any really significant way after their death by the long-lived corporations who value conformity and 'being a team player' above all other virtues. When the corporate institutions that rise up behind them do recognize them, they

¹ Cf. [Christophe Gallaz entretiens avec Edmond Kaiser](#) par Christophe Gallaz (**Broché** - 19 avril 2000)

are usually transformed into ikons that bear little resemblance to the often unique and unorthodox individual historical personalities. Christophe Gallaz's collection of interviews with Edmund Kaiser express some of the passionate, personal and highly personalized and individualistic sentiments of Edmund Kaiser. Unfortunately this text has not yet been translated into English.



But it is still true that behavior was so alienating Federation's national acknowledge him as a illustrate; some even deny simply ignore him. Kaiser bold direct social action, a took the wounded child in his arms; he was an individual who did his best to personally respond to the individual child's needs; and for that too he is to be respected. From the contrary perspective Kaiser was not a leader, not an administrator, not much of a colleague and did not easily bend to other people's ideas and ways. Kaiser deserves to be recognized and accepted for the outstanding qualities he had, not condemned for those he did not have. The bottom line is that thousands and thousands of children owe their very existence as well as the better quality of their lives to Edmund Kaiser and to those who have followed his vision for them.

Kaiser married twice, first to Elizabeth Burnod and then in 1969 to the singer Lucienne Reymond. Trained in office work, he spent 1932-33 in Germany learning the language. In 1940 he served in the French army. Edmund suffered a bizarre tragedy early in his married life; in 1941 his 2-year old son, Jean-Daniel, accidentally fell into an open washing machine and the iron rotor beat him to death and drowned him. Kaiser was devastated by this accident and his grief was protracted. Nevertheless, following his military stint and his immediate state of bereavement he continued to work at resisting the Occupation of France for the next two years (1943-45). There then followed upon the heels of his profound personal loss an embittering experience; Kaiser was accused of treason under the Occupation and imprisoned for a month before being declared innocent in 1947. The next year, in 1948, when he was 27, Edmond left France for Switzerland, where he obtained Swiss citizenship in addition to his French citizenship. With his family he took up residence in Lausanne, where his uncle lived, and found work in the pharmaceutical industry. A violent child's death and a sense of unjust imprisonment are the sorts of experiences that can both embitter and sensitize a man. The sense of injustice stayed with Kaiser and served to galvanize him into action. Perhaps because of those traumas, perhaps because of the human suffering he witnessed while working in his second profession as a journalist, Edmund Kaiser came to focus his considerable capacity for personal passion and dedication on the abused, war-torn children of the world. Both a poet and an author, he expressed himself in two texts: *Mémorial d'une poupée* (1951, ²1985) and *La marche aux enfants* (1979, ²1989).

In the quality and the character of his passion to rescue and defend the vulnerable children in the context of post WW II Europe, he stood somewhat alone. Nevertheless in the 50s Europe's mood was ready for action on behalf of children; there was an undercurrent of feeling: people wanted to do something; and Edmund Kaiser's efforts acted as a catalyst on that mood. He presented Europe with a way to respond to children. At some point Edmund had established an apartment in Geneva. There, on 14th November 1959, in the middle of the Algerian War, he read a report on refugee camps in the weekly publication '*La Réforme*'. The impact of this portrayal of the misery of over one and a half million Algerians greatly disturbed Edmond Kaiser and primed him for action.

The trigger event that gave Edmund Kaiser a new direction in his life was a social incident that was a somewhat shameful political and bureaucratic fumble; it happened in the sky over Geneva. A planeload of war-wounded and orphaned children was being airlifted out of Algeria – supposedly to safety. But somehow no one had arranged for any country to receive them. The airplane circled over Geneva radioing down to the control tower that they had limited fuel supplies and a load of war-torn children. The fact was that no government wanted the plane to land because none of them wanted to have to assume the financial burden that it and its cargo of children represented.

The entire population of Geneva saw and knew about the plane and the children. But it was only the 45-year old journalist Edmund Kaiser who was moved to act on his indignation at this gross example of 'man's inhumanity to man'. Kaiser made effective use of his reporting skills and his journalistic contacts with the result that the government of Geneva was suddenly the focus of a public demand that the plane be allowed to land. Summoned to City Hall as the instigator of the public awareness of this incident, he boldly declared that he would assume responsibility for the children.

Kaiser really had no resources but his own compassion, his indignation, and his somewhat reckless boldness. When the plane landed, the local authorities off-loaded the children and were prepared to temporarily house them, but only temporarily. Edmund rose to the occasion by aggressively confronting just about anybody he happened to run into, including perfect strangers on the street or in the airport to ask them to help one of these children. The children needed to be billeted. One of those people was Doris, a stewardess at the time. "He stopped me in the airport and asked me to take a child. Just like that. We were total strangers to one another. But how do you refuse such a request from such an intense man?" reflected Doris when I interviewed her some twenty years ago.

The size of the task made Kaiser recognize the need to gather around him a group of people who would help him to respond to the plight of war-torn children; he sensed the need for some sort of organization, given the size of the task. Thus after meetings in his apartment in Geneva (in a building that was razed some years ago), there was born in 1960, the idea for a loosely organized group of local people which Kaiser wanted to call "Terre des hommes" (TDH) after Saint-Exupéry's book and the author's family gave Kaiser and TDH the right to do so. Later that year in the neighboring town of Lausanne the second group was registered with the government as a NGO: *Terre des hommes TDH Lausanne* (1960)

THE NAME AND SAINT-EXUPERY

It was a romantic name that Kaiser took from the a book entitled *Terre des Hommes* by the French adventurer-pilot-author-poet Antoine de Saint-Exupéry (1900-1944). Saint-Exupéry is best known for his fabulous fable, the allegorical *Le petit prince / The Little Prince*. Looking down from the open cockpit of his airplane, Saint-Exupéry reflected that he could not see the imaginary lines that delineated the various country borders; in his view the whole world was mankind's domain, a 'terre des hommes' or as the Mayor of Montreal, Jean Drapeau, was to somewhat slant the translation for the World Exposition 1967 in Montreal, Quebec, Canada: "Man and his World". Saint-Exupéry knew so well that there were so many wars and so many maimed and dead children because of these imaginary lines! It is true that Antoine de Saint-Exupéry was a great adventurer but perhaps more importantly he was also known for his ideas on human dignity, underlying responsibilities and solidarity vested in the individual.

In was in 1938 that Saint Exupéry published his reflective, autobiographical, book, *Terre des Hommes*, (published in English as *Wind, Sand, and Stars in 1939*) and studded it with philosophical remarks. Within his original narrative Saint-Exupéry combined the action of his own adventures with a reflection and sensitivity of human values. Recognized by the French Academy as a major French writer and winner of the prestigious *Grand Prix du Roman*, he indeed left an extraordinary literary legacy: 'looking for men's values and the purest feelings of the soul'. The much-quoted book, variously interpreted as a humanitarian, existentialist or Christian allegory, strongly promotes the basic idea of the primacy of the individual response to the needs of others. It goes against the political and ideological excesses of the modern corporate society. Instead it proclaims the "eternal" values of the individual human being: sacrifice, friendship and honor. The book speaks to the world with the voice of the Celts and really only found favor among people of similar bent. But Edmund Kaiser was one of them. Thus the text of *Terre des hommes* seemed to well express Edmund Kaiser's basic philosophy towards the work of a NGO (non-governmental organization) concerned with children; and that philosophy centered on the individual rather than the corporation.

THE LOGO

Similarly, Kaiser's eventually choice of a teardrop logo for the organization Terre des hommes was fully in keeping with personally motivated action. Some 'Teardrop of compassion for the a comment on the approach of wears away the stone' reads the and steady wins the race'. The



Terre des Hommes logo. It is said to represent the idea that 'with continual support of small-scale projects with simple solutions Terre des Hommes tries to better the situation of children in developing countries. Drop by drop'.

Saint Exupéry's basic theme was that motivated community of purpose is the basic human need; "Love does not consist of gazing at each other, but in looking together in the same direction" – an application of the classical Aristotelean definition of the love of friendship. Kaiser considered Terre des Hommes to be 'a movement to combat and directly intervene in the murder of innocent children'. Such a phrase reflects the essential emotional character of Edmund Kaiser. But Kaiser was a man of action. Practically speaking, after he accounted for the first group of children, he immediately brought

another hundred children from the theater of the Algerian conflict to a holiday camp in Switzerland. It was for them an interlude in an otherwise shattered life. For Kaiser and his little group of people it was a way to continue to respond to war-torn children under the name of *Terre des hommes*. Other campaigns quickly followed to help child victims of war and disease in Biafra, Vietnam, Bangladesh, Palestine, Lebanon, Cambodia and elsewhere. Edmund Kaiser became a familiar international figure of compassion.

OTHER TDH ORGANIZATIONS

News of Kaiser's efforts traveled throughout Europe and struck responsive chords in a Europe that was still suffering the emotional scars of World War II. The European peoples were sensitized by the brutalization and crass murder of children; they responded to the opportunity to take care of at least some such children. Through the 1960's people in other European nations were moved to organize similar groups along the lines of Kaiser's Swiss model of *Terre des hommes* and even adopted the same name. The groups all tended to form themselves among local people. For example, about 40 men and women meeting in Stuttgart at the initiative of the typesetter Lutz Beisel eventually founded TDH Germany. One by one the structure and work of their local organizations stabilized; and after some experience on their own and contact with each other, they contacted Kaiser with the suggestion that they were ready to work on behalf of children with the framework of Kaiser's Charter (see the link for 'Charter'). France (1963), Belgium, Holland (1965), Denmark (1967), Germany (1967), Luxembourg, all supported the founding of local versions of Kaiser's Geneva based *Terre des hommes*.

INITIAL CHILD SERVICES: DIRECT AND DELAYED

During this time all the local *Terre des hommes* groups imitated Kaiser in providing medical and social services to children physically and socially hurt by the war. The general pattern was to airlift the children to major center, such as Geneva, to solicit free medical and social services from the local medical personnel and institutions, and then to provide the children with the medical and social care they needed. This policy was a practical illustration of Saint-Exupéry's philosophy: individuals persuaded the institutions to respond to the needs of children.

But the organizational development all happened too fast for Kaiser. The logistics of such a task as helping hurt children by airlift, billeting, hospitalization, language, and sometimes years of physiotherapy or medical treatment were not clear at first. But with a little time and experience it soon became abundantly clear that the practice of providing residence for a serious hurt child who still retained foreign citizenship had to face the significantly difficult and very different kind of task of complying with rigid border laws and immigration regulations. There was a matter of even greater difficulty, these children had to be eventually returned to their homes.

INTERNATIONAL ADOPTION

At yet a different level, inadvertently the children were yet subjected to another stress, viz. emotional coolness in their hosts who feared to become attached to a child whom they knew would, sooner or later, have to return to his or her home country. . Many groups, such as TDH France, tried International Adoption as another way to handle the situation; but it only worked for certain children and did not provide a general solution to the problem. But above all, the groups found working with the perspective adoptive parents too difficult both in terms of the couples' personal emotional needs and the inevitable development of the bureaucratic demands made upon the international

adoption process. And since nearly all the early Terre des hommes groups followed Kaiser's lead in airlifting children, they all more or less faced the same problems. Most groups eventually just gave up on international adoption as an answer even for some of the children.

RETURNING CHILDREN

The experiences upon returning a child to its homeland were often not pleasant. Doris recalls finally taking a child back to his Algerian village. The child had become acclimated to life in cosmopolitan Geneva, and had to be returned to a primitive village lifestyle. The children really did not understand the niceties of the politically motivated bureaucratic cruelties imposed upon them. What they knew was that the generous people who had cared for them for months or even years, suddenly took them back to a war-ravaged situation where they were unwanted and where, often, they were simply left on some reluctant distant relative's doorstep because there was no one left to care for them. The anguish of the emotional partings between the grieving volunteer Swiss caretakers and the emotionally bereft children now left standing among a somewhat hostile group of villagers seared both of their souls. Some would never quite get over the experience. Emotion still broke through Doris's voice as she told me of her experiences many years after it had happened.

As an alternative, in Geneva they tried to place the children in a group home. The Massongex House was founded in the canton of Valais: a refuge for children brought to Switzerland for surgical intervention to convalesce prior to their return home. But that institutional solution certainly could not meet every child's need. So the problems concerned with airlifting children for medical care remained.

THE FEDERATION

By 1966, that is, 6 years later the groups of national Terre des hommes were sufficiently organized to adopt Kaiser's Charter for the purpose of establishing the objectives and principal ethics of the association. The contacts the groups had with each other led them towards the idea of forming a larger group; as a result the International Federation of Terre des hommes (IFTDH) was established in 1966.

But the world continued to change, as did the developing role of NGO's. The context of political change and the very real problems associated with airlifting children for medical care resulted in many of the national groups rethinking their orientation. They decided that they needed to think about helping children in some different ways. Those 'different' ways involved developing formal projects and the bureaucracy to administer them and finally to political lobbying to establish local laws in support grass-root project activity. Kaiser, faithful to Saint-Exupéry's philosophy and his own idea of how an NGO should respond to children, did not agree.

KAISER'S DEPARTURE AND TDH LAUSANNE

Since its creation in 1960 by Edmond Kaiser TDH Lausanne had remained his base of his personal operation. And during a dozen years of service TDH Lausanne stretched its service and its influence across several European countries. At the same time the other TDH groups, operating independently but guided by Kaiser's policies, began to see things differently. The crunch came in 1972, during the General Assembly of the Terre des hommes organizations in Europe. By that time a huge majority of the representatives were in favor of a fundamental modification of the objectives. Edmond Kaiser did not agree, and thus decided to leave the International Federation of Terre des hommes in

protest and to continue his work in Lausanne according to the principles and obligations which he had determined at the start. Also, it did not help matters that the group did not want to elect Kaiser's chosen candidate for the post of President of the Federation.

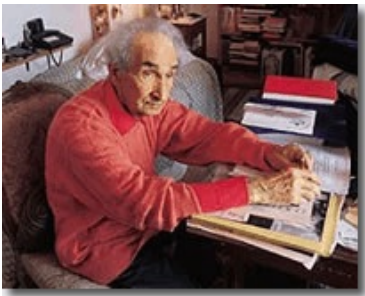
FEDERATION FRACTURED

The Bylaws of the Federation stipulated that there could be only one Terre des hommes group per country. It was, of course, a European notion, and somewhat unrealistic as a global rule, but it was the rule. So the walkout of the TDH group in Lausanne immediately produced a political problem for the Swiss. The group in the neighboring town, TDH Geneva, which used the name TDH Switzerland, did not walk out of the Assembly with Kaiser and the rest of TDH Lausanne. Further TDH Geneva faced yet another fracture. The group in the German Canton of Switzerland chose to identify itself as TDH Basel separately from TDH Switzerland (Geneva). Although TDH Geneva and TDH Basel today are united under one name, TDH Switzerland and TDH Lausanne remains separate and the division remains an issue for the Federation. But, it must be admitted: the difficulties these three groups have faced in trying to get together, and the continuing rift between TDH Switzer and TDH Lausanne reflects the behavior and style of the organization's founder.

These internal issues of squabbling stem from Kaiser's personal lack of a unifying vision for TDH. Saint-Exupéry's philosophy was long on loving sentiment, but short on practical organization. The political problem was real. And the desire to fix the problem resulted in serious threats to its health and existence. For example Ron van Huizen of the Netherlands deliberately tried to dissolve the Federation in order to impose his vision for restructuring upon the Federation, by excluding of some members and merging the Federation with another much larger and far more conservative aid organization. The very looseness of the Federation and its flexibility and resiliency caused his effort to fail. In disappointment van Huizen removed TDH Netherlands from the Federation for a while, but found that being alone was not such a good position to find himself in; TDH Netherlands returned to the Federation right after the Millennium. The exercise consumed much of the Federation's energy and hampered its development.

KAISER'S FINAL WITHDRAWAL

Kaiser's rigidity continued to trouble the situation in Lausanne and was further complicated by the addition of new and very difficult personalities into the leadership of TDH Lausanne. Unable to find a common ground with the new administration of TDH



Lausanne himself, Edmund Kaiser finally left Terre des hommes altogether in 1980. And true to his principles, immediately founded yet another organization: *Sentinelles* (<http://www.sentinelles.org>). This one was oriented towards opposing the sexual mutilation of women and child prostitution. And it is this latter organization that most publicly recognizes its founder, Edmund Kaiser by posting his picture and describing him as "The unforgettable and unforgotten founder and motivating spirit of Sentinelles."

To distinguish itself from the group of national organizations known as the International Federation of Terre des hommes, and from its neighboring TDH Geneva, eight years

after being abandoned by Edmund Kaiser, the new structure created by Edmond Kaiser with the name of Terre des hommes Lausanne changed its Statutes of Association to become the Terre des hommes Foundation. These new statutes were deposited with the relevant supervisory authority, the Swiss Federal Department of the Interior. So today TDH Lausanne is uniquely known as Foundation TDH.

WORK OF TDH

In spite of their internal difference, the members of the International Federation of Terre des hommes have continued to work to relieve the suffering of children. The Federation members have continued to try, with various approaches according to the nuances of national styles, to defend the right of children especially in times of war or natural catastrophe or in less publicized situations of distress. Over the last forty years the members of the Federation as a group have specialized in three areas of expertise: the health, psychosocial care and the rights of the child.

TDH AS A CHILD RIGHTS ORGANIZATION

As TDH Holland says on its website, Terre des Hommes has evolved to become “a child rights organization that helps organizations in developing countries...(by insuring that) the rights of children are respected and fulfilled.”

”Our guiding principle is the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, in which all rights of a child are laid down in 40 articles. Because we cannot ensure that children are able to exercise all these rights, we have chosen what we consider to be the four most important: the rights to education, health, protection and development. In these fields Terre des Hommes supports worldwide 297 projects in 22 countries.”

FEDERATION AS A LOBBY

But now in 2006, the Federation is faced with yet another crisis: that of the changing roles of the NGO in the world. In 2000 the Federation elected Dr. Raffaele Salinari of TDH Italy as the President of the Federation. As Dr. Salinari’s CV attests, he is a man of wide and even profound experience in the world of NGO activity. His ascendancy to the Presidency of the Federation benefited both him, by giving him a platform on which to operate, and TDH, by putting a man at its head who had a vision that reached far beyond the squabbles among the Federation members. In spite of the Federation’s limited budget, Raffaele took the step of hiring Salvatore Parata as the part-time representative of the International Federation of Terre des hommes at the newly constituted European Union in Brussels. In these three years, the exposure Salvatore has gained for TDH has grown. By 2006 Salvatore has justified a full-time salary for himself and even a half-time assistant.

The significance of Salvatore’s role in Brussels is tied up with two factors, first the growing impact of the European Union on world affairs, including NGO financing (for in Europe NGOs receive government financing) and the changing perspective of the sociopolitical world on NGOs. The various States are beginning to see a diversification of role for the NGO and as a result are beginning to treat them differently.

The underlying policy is to recognize that children will continue to be abused and made to suffer in spite of local direct programs of aid unless there is a change at the political level of national attitudes towards children. The concretization of this issue usually is worked out on the platform of Children’s Rights. And the discussion of Children’s Rights and their concrete implication is held at the various political meetings attended by both

representatives of the States and of the NGO. It is a new role for the NGOs and one that is still developing.

In the face of the need to frankly establish an effective lobby for Children's Rights in the conference rooms of international organizations, it turns out that basic human behavior still rules. Politically speaking, it is a case of "is your's bigger than mine". The discussion of Children's Rights, which results in the management of life and death issues for hundreds of thousands of children, has to be held in forums which size of membership matters politically.

Thus the role of the International Federation of Terre des hommes has again evolved into a dual role: on one hand the Federation now supports a lobby at the European Union; on the other hand, it has a vast footprint in the world of direct care of children. However, in order to make the voice of TDH heard over the din at the conference table, TDH has to evolve yet again towards achieving a greater population base. That is the major current challenge for TDH's President. Raffaele Salinari has two years left in his term as President. And the world is changing quickly. He must work now to find a way to increase TDH's power base in order to be an effective lobby for the suffering children in the world.

Perhaps Salinari's most significant characteristic is that he has the vast range of grass-root experience of direct care for children all over the world to support him. The challenge for the Federation is to support Raffaele and his agent, Salvatore, with appropriate data. And that is indeed a challenge for the Members of the Federation. So far, no new organizational elements have been introduced at the level of the Federation to facilitate that information analysis and sharing. It is the challenge of the Brussels Office and the Federation to find a way to produce the appropriate level of analyzed information for those engaging in the political forums.

TDH AND BALANCES

Additionally there is the legacy of Edmund Kaiser to consider. Lobbying on one hand must somehow must result in the promotion to direct care on the other hand otherwise it is mere useless talk while children suffer and die. Kaiser was right in insisting on the important of the direct care element. Saint-Exupéry/Kaiser's insistence on the human element in childcare remaining the bottom line for TDH and its members remains as true today as it did 1960. To quote the famous remark of

TDH'S ACTIVITY

As of 2005, IFTDH's many branch organizations **supported or ran** 1,215 development and humanitarian aid programs affecting some 300,000 children in 64 countries in Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, and the Middle East. The Federation has 1,028 local and national NGO partners, employs more than 1,500 people, and benefits from the efforts of at least 7,500 volunteers. Its global budget for 2005 was \$137.8 million; approximately 73 percent of that total was derived from private donations.

