



## **Jonathan Yiangou (2010 British German Forum participant)**

### **Testimonial**

My experience of the "British-German Forum" was that it was anything but "British" and "German". The issues we touched upon over the week at Wilton Park were contemporary, multifaceted and global -- as were all the participants. It was a programme that had the effect, not of reinforcing national dimensions, but rather of shaking out preconceived ideas.

This was a consequence of the diversity of the agenda. Sometimes issues were discussed that you knew deeply; other times it was a complete learning experience. This had an uncanny capacity to pull you off safe ground and make you question your preconceptions. I found myself frequently locked in debates I found uncomfortable -- which was fantastic, because it showed my ideas were being tested.

The diverse backgrounds of the participants and speakers had the same effect. There were some people who reflected your view of the world, others who really challenged it. There was no woolly, automatic consensus. This does not mean that people were at each others' throats -- far from it. There was instead something dialectical about the whole process: thesis from one person; antithesis from another; and then normally a more interesting and revealing synthesis at the end.

This was aided by an environment that was extremely conducive to debate. The grounds of Wiston House are truly stunning, and the experience of living together, eating together -- playing croquet together! -- creates a real hot-house effect. It is also extremely well moderated. It would be easy for a group as diverse to end up unfocused and talking across one another. But this never happened. Conversations were steered to relevant questions; many voices were heard; there was no takeover by a few strong personalities.

Why attend the British-German Forum? If you want to have your opinions repeated back to you, spend your time somewhere else. If you want to be reminded why most debates are complex, why answers are never simple, and why deep questions are worth fighting over, then this week is hard to beat.