

Vacation from War

Dialogues across Borders



SPECIAL BULLETIN MAY 2020: TAKING THE CRISIS AS A CHANCE

Dear sponsors,

Dear supporters,

the corona pandemic is forcing the *Vacation from War* project to change plans for this year. In the past few weeks, it has become clear that we have to go different ways in 2020: both the dialogue seminars for Israelis and Palestinians in Germany and the big Youth Encounter for young people from the countries of the former Yugoslavia cannot take place as planned.

Above all, we were guided by our responsibility for the health of our employees and participants when making these decisions. In addition, the development of the situation is so uncertain that we did not want to let cancellation deadlines for flights and accommodation pass, taking seriously our financial responsibility towards the project and towards you, who make the project possible through your donations.

Questions about entry requirements to Germany and any associated conditions remain open as well. The same is true in the former Yugoslavia: the young people come from different countries and it is unclear

which travel regulations will apply in Croatia in summer.

Alternatives for 2020

Instead, with our partners we have decided to use the im-possibilities that the pandemic creates in a constructive way - with new formats and concepts, some of them have already been discussed, but until now either time or additional funding was lacking in the past. We can gain experience for future work from this year's new activities. In addition, we will offer partners in the project regions opportunities for small trainings. This way, we can use the crisis as an opportunity.

Specifically, the coordinators of the women's* seminar are currently planning a series of multi-day meetings for participants of past seminars in Israel and Palestine from autumn onwards, in which opportunities for joint activism form a central topic. In this way, work in the region can be further stabilized and intensified - expanding this area of work has been on our agenda for a

long time: it is an important aspect for strengthening the impact on local societies. The coordinators of the Allenders-Seminar even have set out to organize a Dialogue Seminar locally.

In the former Yugoslavia, young people from YU-Peace are currently involved in neighborhood assistance or support initiatives organized by the Red Cross.

Our partners will make up for what is already planned, i.e. a follow-up camp for alumni and several weekend visits, in the last quarter of this year. An "online camp" is planned for the summer, in which the young people can exchange ideas across borders in virtual spaces and participate in various political workshops.

So this year, a lot will be different than usual, but our work continues!

We are grateful for your ideational and financial support!

Between Lockdown and Activism: Perspectives from Israel and Palestine

Since I rushed back to Israel from a stay abroad, things were starting to look darker and darker.

The current government is more corrupt than ever and they seem to be taking advantage of the crisis to destroy the remaining of de-

media is cooperating with the government on every issue, betraying us citizens for reasons I don't even know.

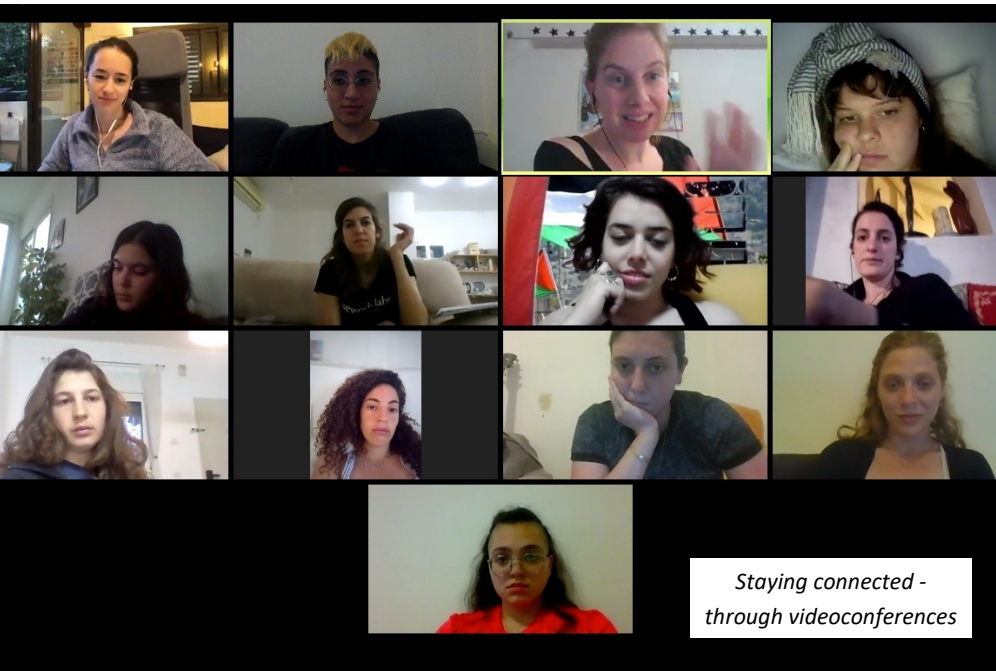
At the same time, our beautiful group of Israeli participants from last year's women's* seminar de-

discuss about the topic together.

Recently, on Israel's "independence day", the symbolically chosen topic was "planning the return of the Palestinian refugees". It was absolutely fascinating to discuss such a contested subject in that forum and on this day. Naturally, it brought up many difficult questions: Questions about what happened in 1948, in what ways it is still happening today and how the Palestinian refugees come back in the future. For me, the most important aspect of our discussion was acknowledging together the importance of developing our political imagination and articulating, at least within our community, the future we want to fight for – even when it seems so far away.

These sessions fill me with hope, inspiration and pride in this challenging time. As much as I'm mourning that we had to cancel this year's seminar, I am also looking forward to investing those resources in nurturing our growing community here in Israel and Palestine.

Martha D., Israeli coordinator of the women's* seminar*



mocracy I didn't even know we still had.

One of the hardest parts for me when coming back were my first two weeks in obligatory isolation. I had to spend it at my parents' house, where the TV is constantly on, and I had to witness how the

decided that if we can't meet physically, we should have a videoconference every week to exchange and learn together. Each session is led by one of us around a certain topic; it does not have to be necessarily connected to Covid-19 or to the occupation. Afterwards, we

„Palestine is not an independent state and has no control over its borders. The health system has suffered from a lack of medical equipment and expertise for years. All of these factors affect the range of measures and decisions that the Palestinian Authority takes and can take. Since the pandemic broke out, there has been a public debate about the Authority's competence and capacities: many Palestinians doubt that it could deal with a large number of patients and deaths. Prevention measures were one of the only things they could do. So they declared a state of emergency

and issued a curfew in Palestinian cities - although there were no infected people in some of these places.

Rhana K., Palestinian coordinator of the women's*seminar*

„My family and I are totally dependent on public transport. We live in a suburb far from the city center. Something as simple as buying food has been a complicated task since the pandemic broke out. We always have to organize ourselves well and see if family members can

help us that day because the neighborhoods have also been separated by the police - to ensure that people practice social distancing. One day I went for a walk around the house. I looked down the street and saw a small shop selling fruits and vegetables. I was so excited and relieved! I haven't seen any of my friends in over two months and I'm very concerned about how long this situation will continue. It just feels like things will never go back to normal.“

Kira M., former participant from the Palestinian Westbank*

„Living under siege in Gaza is difficult: power outages, very bad internet (...).

I never thought that there would be a time when our suffering would multiply over again. We have been instructed to stay at home and follow the instructions of the World Health Organization since

the pandemic began. I was worried about losing my income, but we were asked to work from home - luckily for us. But there are also many employees who, like me, work for private companies or international organizations that have been laid off in the wake of the pandemic.

Now our workload has increased many times over since the training courses that we organize can also be carried out digitally.“

Mira F., former participant from the Gaza Strip*

Confronting challenges solidarily: Voices from the Former Yugoslavia

In the past few weeks, people in the former Yugoslavia have been affected by major restrictions due to the corona pandemic, about which our partners share regularly with us. There were strict curfews in many places, which have since been loosened again. Many people are unsettled by the local media coverage, and they are also concerned about the ailing state of the hospitals.

While our partners believe that government measures to prevent the spread of the virus are important, they also denounce the restriction of important fundamental rights and harshly criticize their governments for using the crisis for their own political and nationalist purposes.

Many of our project staff are very concerned about the economic impact of the lockdown and fear losing their jobs.

The curfews – like in many places – in the former Yugoslavia brought great challenges, especially for children and adolescents: not being able to leave the apartment for weeks, no meetings with peers, no joint sports activities, school online. The latter is only possible via cell phone for many due to the lack of computers, and not at all possible for those who have no internet connection.

The situation required creative re-thinking: in all cities, alternatives to the regular project work were quickly considered. The individual city-groups already meet online.

This enables the young people to exchange information about the current situation, but also about topics other than Corona, at least by video conference. This way, they are able to follow up on issues that are important to them. In the current situation, many find it motivating to exchange ideas with like-minded people. In addition, the active young people and employees of our partner organizations show solidarity with elderly people and others in need and get involved in neighborhood assistance, volunteer with the Red Cross or participate in the collective sewing of protective masks.

In the following section, we share voices from an active youngster and a young employee of *Vacation*

From War from Gornji Vakuf-Uskoplje.

„The current situation is particularly difficult for me because this year is supposed to be a turning point in my life. I am currently graduating from high school and wanted to celebrate my graduation with my family and friends. I was going to go to different universities in Sarajevo to find the best one for me. Instead, I was now only able to apply digitally and do the admission exams the best I could.

Actually, I want to use this time to learn new things. But I lack motivation and I feel constantly stressed. What gives me structure is my work as a coordinator in the Youth Center. The different tasks, taking





Staying at Home: Deserted street in Sombor, Serbien

responsibility - this is fulfilling for me.

I also try to do something for my family, for others or for myself every day. I take part in online workshops and courses to counter the feeling of social and professional isolation.

My work in the various projects of the Youth Center is currently continuing without youngsters: We are trying to make the best of the situation and have just applied for funds for a project that is intended to support people in times of the pandemic. The members of the Youth Group are waiting to take up joint actions again and to spend time together. In order to maintain contact, we exchange information about the current events online and plan together what to do next and how we want to do it.

A life after Corona will come and we hope to be able to really meet again in person soon to work together and have fun."

Almina Sehic, coordinator of The Youth Center in Gornji Vakuf-Uskoplje

„I am finishing secondary school this year and I had made a detailed plan for the last months of

this school year. I was really looking forward to the end-of-school trip and the prom, but unfortunately, due to the pandemic, none of it will happen. I am still trying to adapt to this situation and do something productive with all the time. I don't want to remember the Corona period as one in which I only slept, but as a time in which I learned a lot of new things. I am currently learning Spanish. I hope not to screw up my final grades with the online lessons, but I miss my normal life. Until recently, I would never have imagined that there would be time in which I would *want* to go back to school and spend time with my classmates - and even would miss the teachers a little.

I long for the Youth Center and can't wait to continue our activities in the "real world" and not just meet in the digital world. I hope that this situation will soon be over and that we can return to our everyday life.

New adventures in a new school await me and I'm really looking forward to it!

Maya Musa, member of the Youth Group in Gornji Vakuf-Uskoplje

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Also in times of Corona we need your support - to fund this year's alternative activities and cover our running costs.

Thank you!

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Editorial

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Committee for Fundamental Rights and Democracy

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