

Vacation From War

Dialogues across Borders



CALL FOR DONATIONS 2019

Dear sponsors and supporters,

as we write this bulletin, the media once again reports of air strikes and rocket fire in Gaza and clashes at the Gaza border in which a youngster was killed.

Scopes of action for activists who campaign for dialogue in Israel and Palestine are diminishing. On both sides they are publicly defamed as “traitors” – increasingly also by the state – and exposed to harsh hostilities.

“Between protest and desperation” properly summarizes the range of what many people in the countries of the former Yugoslavia feel about the situation there. Their anger and disappointment is evident in the ongoing demonstrations against abuse of power and corruption, and for an end to political arbitrariness.

Many of our staff members are strengthened by their commitment to YU-Peace and the possibilities of coun-

tering nationalist propaganda and practically contributing to positive change in their countries it provides. Being part of YU-Peace encourages them to keep going despite the difficult situation.

This shows how important our work in the former Yugoslavia still – and especially right now – is, even if the wars ended a long time ago.

Vacation from War continues! Despite shrinking scopes of action, our partners take the space they need to turn back the spiral of violence and hateful agitation through encounters and dialogue with the “Others”.

For this, they need our as well as your support, also financially. Because: *Vacation from War* is funded through private donations, which secures our political independence.

**Please support our Peace Work with
your Donation!**

Dialogue Seminars and Youth Encounters in Summer of 2019

In May 2019, Palestinian and Israeli participants of the 2018 All-genders-seminar will be showing small theatrical performances in Israel and Palestine as part of their follow-up activities. At the moment, rehearsals and preparations are ongoing.

In the former Yugoslavia, the Peace Camp with 120 participants will take place in Split, Croatia this July. There will also be peace camps for active participants from previous years, an encounter for students, and mutual “weekend visits”.

In August 2019, the dialogue seminar for young women* from Israel and Palestine will take place in Germany.

In the all-genders-seminar in mid-August, young women and men from Israel and Palestine work for the first time with a new method that combines the political-narrative approach with non-violent communication.

We are very much looking forward to realizing this concept with new partners.

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Coordinator

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Board Member Committee f. Fundamental Rights and Democracy

The Presence of the Past in Srebrenica

Valentina Gagić-Lazić heads our partner organization "Sara" in Srebrenica, with which we have been working since 2016. Valentina Gagić-Lazić lives and works in Srebrenica.

(Author: Valentina Gagić-Lazić) As the return to Srebrenica began very spontaneously in 2000, the politicians had no time to divide the city and the school into ethnic groups. The young people grow up together and the city is rebuilt on

people only hear about the war from their parents or relatives, who usually have a perspective that only recognizes their own group as victims and accuses all „Others“ of being war criminals. The genocide continues to be denied. The dead become numbers in a competition for who has more victims. Obtaining unbiased facts about the war is very difficult. That is why our work and that of similar initiatives are so valuable and indispensable.

Through YU-Peace, young people have the opportunity to speak openly with one another, exchange their opinions and, what is particularly important, see the other side of the coin. I can see the positive changes

it. The peace camp in Srebrenica gave us a lot of momentum. For the first time, we were able to speak openly about the sensitive issues. Some parents did not allow their children to go to the memorial sites with us. This was true mostly for the Serbian youngsters. We are aware that they do this because they are afraid of the reactions of those around them. But we also experience that the young people make other decisions when they experience that they don't stand alone with them.

A young girl shared in a television interview about how sad she was that her parents told her not to go to Potocari (memorial to the victims of the massacre). "When I'm 18, I'll change that," she said.

After the YU-Peace Camp, everyone spoke with more courage about the problems and youngsters started numerous own initiatives.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize how important YU-Peace is for us because we are united by a shared vision here and work to improve society in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The role of the Committee for Fundamental Rights and Democracy is very important, as it offers young people unique opportunities for action and does emphasize self-promotion and popularity for itself as a donor.



Participants visit the memorial site Potocari

multi-ethnic foundations. But one of our main problems is that we don't have a public dialogue about the past and the war. We do not mention it because we fear that the fragile peace could be endangered. This is bad because young

in their attitudes.

Unfortunately, we live in a society that venerates war criminals and soldiers as heroes, while people who risked their lives to help others cannot speak openly about

Seeing the *Others* as fellow human beings

Miriam S. is 22 years old, studied English linguistics and literature and now works at the University of Nablus. She was born in Nablus and grew up there. With Laura Kotzur she spoke about her experiences in the Women*seminar in summer 2018.*

Laura Kotzur: What motivated you

to participate in the seminar?

Miriam S.: I haven't had contact with Israelis in my entire life. But I think it is very important to hear both sides to understand the whole conflict. (...) For this reason, I applied for the seminar. (...)

Palestine is still a developing country and the press is not exactly a

strong force. I think, for example, that many human rights violations are not communicated to the rest of the world.

And to me it felt like the Israelis didn't know much about it either. They see the narrative that has been imparted to them throughout their lives.

So I wanted to talk to the Israelis and tell them what their own country is doing.(...)

L.K.: What was it like to tell your story?

M.S.: I think that many of the group wanted to understand. They listened, asked questions and were very compassionate. (...) They weren't ashamed, but somehow they understood and recognized what was happening in different parts of the country and felt responsible.

They believed that they could steer their country in a different direction to change something and find a more peaceful way. I think our stories contributed a lot to that.

I was expecting us to arrive here with a certain attitude and leave with the same one. But I was completely wrong. We have changed - not just the Israelis, but also the Palestinians. I never saw Israelis as human beings and I don't think they ever saw us that way. We have always been told that they only want to harm us. But seeing the human side is extremely important to find a solution.

L.K.: How did you feel at the beginning of the seminar and was there a turning point for you later?

M.S.: At the beginning we didn't know each other. The general mood was very tense and there was an atmosphere in which none of us trusted the others.

We were afraid because the Israelis started taking notes all the time! I thought they would create profiles of us and then report us. (...)

At first we didn't want to participate because of the "normalization". But it quickly became clear to us that this is not the point at all.



When you start talking to each other, you forget the conflict and you see the others as people who also suffer, even if it is a different kind of suffering. (...) We talked about the Intifada and the loved ones we lost. The Israelis reacted very sympathetically and then spoke of suicide bombings on buses. There are so many events from which they suffer. It was very important for all of us to talk about it in order to experience healing. (...)

L.K.: How was it for you to hear the stories of the other group?

M.S.: I did not know that the actions of some individuals, we call them extremists, because it is not an organized movement, i.e. the suicide bombers, that these individuals influence the lives of so many people.

The fear they live with is just horrible. Maybe as bad as our fear when we go through the checkpoints, and maybe as bad as our fear when we lose a friend. So many have shared what it is like to lose friends.

It was really revealing because I never thought they would go through this. I wish I could do something to stop this. (...)

L.K.: Today is the last day of the seminar. What do you feel when

you think about going back home?

M.S.: To be honest, I'm not that enthusiastic. I don't have so much freedom to speak and to move freely at home. It is difficult for me to come home whenever I am abroad. I go through this depressive phase every time.


Even if I am not a German citizen, I have all these rights here. Not even at home, where I am a citizen, I have such freedom.

L.K.: Thank you for your thoughts. Do you want to add anything else

I really appreciate that we were only women in the seminar. This gave us the space we needed to feel free, to become emotional, to cry and to show our feelings. Also not to be rated and judged and to be told that we were weak or something. Men don't express their emotions like we do.

Being only with women was really good, and I can't remember the last instance I spent such a long time with so many wonderful and inspiring women.

I really enjoyed it. Thanks a lot for this!



Donate and Support: Multiple Opportunities on our new homepage

Last years' seminars showed us once again that it is worthwhile facilitating opportunities for young people to talk to each other and to take the initiative to transform their society.

During the encounters in the former Yugoslavia and also during the dialogue seminars between young people from Israel and Palestine, the participants appreciate the opportunity to engage intensively with the "Others".

They use this space, which is increasingly shrinking at least in Israel and Palestine, for open dialogues.

The *Vacation from War* project is funded by private donations and foundations, collections in parishes and peace groups, for birthdays, funerals or fundraisers by schools and initiatives.

If you would like to collect donations through an event to the benefit of Vacation From War or would like to tell friends and acquaintances about the project, we would love to send you information material free of charge.

We also gladly visit you and your group, initiative or church parish and share about the Project.

In the future we will expand the various options for support and donations and provide comprehensive information about them on our new, revised homepage.

In addition – as before – you will find news about the project, general information about our work, publications, photos, interviews with participants, press reports on *Vacation From War* and much more.

In addition to a facilitated online donation options, there will also be a digital newsletter through which you can receive current information and our publications via email in the future.

Of course, you can continue to receive all publications in print free of charge and also make your donation 'manually' using the tried and tested paper transfer form.

We are working feverishly on our online presence and hope to launch in May - we would be happy if you visit us on the new homepage!

Donations account *Vacation From War*

Account holder: Grundrechtekomitee

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Donations to the project are tax-deductable. Please fill in your address under „purpose“ in the bank transfer. You will receive a donation receipt in January of the following year.

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www.dialoge-und-begegnungen.de

Editorial

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