

Vacation From War

Dialogues across Borders



CALL FOR DONATIONS

Dear sponsors and supporters,

As we write these lines, protests and demonstrations at the border between Israel and the Gaza Strip are taking place. There are many deaths and injuries; once again it becomes obvious that currently, there seem to be no strategies beyond violence and escalation.

Many of the participants come to the dialogue seminars without any concrete expectations – their whole lives have been shaped too much by disappointments and a deterioration of the current situation in Israel and Palestine. The dialogue enables them to share their points of view and often also the hopelessness they feel with regards to the political situation. After the seminar, many participants feel changed. One

participant wrote: "Thank you for turning my life upside down!"

In former Yugoslavia, many, especially well-educated, people are leaving the countries looking for jobs in Western Europe. Members of the Youth United in Peace (YU-Peace) network tell us how important their work in the project is to them as it gives them the opportunity to change something in their society and work towards a better future.

Dialogue cannot solve all conflicts. But we firmly believe that there will be no solution without these young people in Israel and Palestine and in the former Yugoslavia! *"It really matters what you do. It made me a more attentive and compassionate person. I have a lot to process now, but that's better than closing my eyes"*, a participant shared.

The Project *Vacation From War* is funded through private donations.

Please support our Peace Work.

Thank you and best regards!

Barbara Esser
Coordinator

Brigitte Klaß
Coordinator

Theo Christiansen
Board Member Committee f. Fundamental Rights
and Democracy

Encounters 2018

In summer 2018, the seminar for 58 young women* from Israel and the Palestinian Westbank will be organized for the first time independently by women*.

The second seminar, for 58 young men and women from Israel and Palestine will also take place under new coordination, as long-time employees have left the project for personal reasons.

The situation in Israel and Palestine makes dialogue work more and more difficult.

That is why we find it all the more remarkable to see many activists continuously motivated and interested in organizing dialogue, with a lot of idealism.

In the former Yugoslavia, the YU-Peace network is busy making new contacts and planning many activities for this year.

120 participants will participate in this year's Youth Encounter in Croatia, many more in follow-up meetings and weekend visits.

“It strengthened the awareness that we have common interests.”

At the end of the dialogue seminars, we ask the participants to anonymously answer a few questions. This feedback provides an insight into the processes the participants go through during the seminars and what impressions they return home.

What made you decide to participate in this seminar?

Huda (Pal.): I wanted to try something new. It was the first time for me to participate in such a program and I wanted to learn more about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and

get to know the other side's perspective.

May (Pal.): I live in this conflict and suffer every day from the occupation; I wanted to meet our enemies. Not with belligerent intentions, but to talk and to learn more about them, about how they live and what they think about us.

Ori (Isr.): I wanted to gain more and better knowledge about the conflict. I thought such a seminar could be a good start for this.

Noam (Isr.): I have decided that I can no longer ignore the situation. I work with Palestinians in the com-

plex city of Jerusalem, but I have the feeling like I know nothing about the situation in the West-bank or Gaza.

What did you expect from this seminar?

Huda (Pal.): I expected to be understood because it is about freely sharing what I think and what is happening. I expected to discuss a lot and to find different views on many points. I even expected real fights between the two sides.

May (Pal.): I thought before that it won't be very deep, not really serious.

Ori (Isr.): Honestly, I don't know what I actually expected, but these few expectations have been exceeded. I was a little naive in my views on the situation, but I learned a lot. I previously thought that it was a two-way conflict, but realized here that there is a clear power gap and one side is responsible for what is happening.

Have you ever met Israelis / Palestinians before?

May (Pal.): No, I have never met Israelis.

Ori (Isr.): My mother works with Palestinians and I met them. But I never called them "Palestinians", but Israeli Arabs and we never spoke about the conflict.

Noam (Isr.): I met Palestinians at the university and also at work. But I never had the courage to talk to



The Seminars for young adults from Palestine and Israel offer spaces for intense and controversial discussions.

them about such topics. I always felt that it was going to destroy our relationship.

What was important for you during the workshops?

Huda (Pal.): It was important for me to express my point of view clearly towards the other side, as it is, without always being respectful all the time.

Ori (Isr.): It was particularly important to me to hear a lot of very different opinions. And it was important not to be afraid to dig deeper into topics and to discuss them.

Was there a special moment for you?

Huda (Pal.): I personally have heard many great and thoughtful things that have changed my thinking about Israelis. For example, there are many pro-Palestinian Israelis who are really trying their best to fundamentally support Palestinians. I am very happy to know this.

Ori (Isr.): I was really shocked to hear the personal stories of the Palestinians. This and information from the facilitators about what happened in 1948 gave me a new perspective on the balance of power in this conflict. Something that will also stay with me was the statement that it is 'my political duty to have hope for peace'.

Noam (Isr.): One participant said she was afraid to have children because she felt she could not ensure their safety and everything they needed. It was heartbreaking and disturbing to me, and at that moment I understood how much pain and suffering they have to endure, and that I can't stay seated and en-



joy my life and wait for something to change. I have to act.

To what extent did current political events influence the seminar?

Huda (Pal.): The seminar requires you to speak freely, but unfortunately this is not possible in the current political situation.

Ori (Isr.): I tried not to read any news during the seminar. One day we talked about how the Palestinians are treated by the Israeli police. It was on that very day that I read that a young, unarmed Palestinian was shot dead by the police in Jaffa, and that subsequent violent protests were violently suppressed by the police. I read it with a new attitude and it was difficult.

What did it mean for you to attend a women*-only seminar?

Huda (Pal.): To understand the problems of women and especially to see the common problems that we encounter in our everyday life.

Ori (Isr.): Looking back, I'm happy because it was a feminist experience for me and I know that me and other women would have spoken less in a mixed seminar. Being among women creates a safe

space.

What do you think women can do to make peace?

Huda (Pal.): Protests, demonstrations - as history shows us.

May (Pal.): Women can play a leading role in ending the occupation. I would like to have a workshop on this. We could collect ideas, plan and implement things professionally as soon as we get back home.

Ori (Isr.): I think it is a war between men and more women are needed in the parliaments and in the places where the tough discussions are going on.

Do you want to add something?

Huda (Pal.): It broadened my horizons. I felt like I could just say and ask what I think freely!

Ori (Isr.): Thank you for this great experience!

Noam (Isr.): I really enjoyed it and learned a lot. It changed my life and was very important to me!



Participants' Voices from the Former Yugoslavia

(Text: Jovanna D.) I am absolutely certain that I am on the right path, together with many others who are pursuing the same goal. Some have been with us for years, new people join us every day. They are not full of hate and do not live in a lie. They try to convince others that differences in nationality or religion are not grounds for hatred. We are not ready to accept separated schools, cities, families, we want to prevent our children from

being educated to hate. We boys want to leave the past behind and change society. We can do it, give us a chance. We build peace. What we feel at every camp and weekend visit is hard to describe. Every moment is valuable and I am sure it will go on. I thank everyone who walks this path with me and spread peace and love. My special thanks go to my teachers Valerija and Jasmina, who directed my feet onto this path.

Donate and Support

Last year, we experienced once again how valuable and important it is to bring together young people from different sides of conflicts. Whether at the Israeli-Palestinian seminars or the encounters in the Balkans – everywhere participants use the time together for intensive discussions. The *Vacation from War* project is funded by private donations and foundations, collections at family celebrations, donations in memo-

ry of a loved one, collectinos in parishes and peace groups or at fundraisers by schools and initiatives. Distributing flyers or brochures is a great help for us. We would be happy to send you information material.

Gift Cards - Give donations

For christmas, birthdays, anniversaries etc. you can purchase Gift Cards of an amount of your choice.

Prizes and Awards for the Project and its contributors

- 2016 Krunoslav Sukic Prize (Network „Youth United in Peace“)
- 2016 Hermann Maas Prize of the Evangelical Church in Heidelberg
- 2013 Peter Becker Prize for the Peace Policy of the Committee for Fundamental Rights and Democracy
- 2011 3rd place at the international Anna Lindh Prize
- 2010 Julius Rumpf Prize of the Martin Niemöller Foundation
- 2007 Erich Mühsam Award
- 2005 Panter Prize of the newspaper “tageszeitung (taz)”
- 2003 Mount Zion Award, Jerusalem
- 2003 Stuttgart Peace Prize

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Committee for Fundamental Rights and Democracy *Project Vacation From War*

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The work of *Vacation From War* is supported by the Foundation *Dialogues and Encounters*.
www.dialogue-und-begegnungen.de

