



AUTUMN BULLETIN 2023

Dear supporters,

we are glad to look back on an eventful summer full of intense and exciting dialogue encounters. As we write these lines, this year's peace camp in Seget Donji on the Croatian Adriatic coast is just coming to an end. There, 70 teenagers and young adults from Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia met for a ten-day Peace Camp with numerous workshops (see cover picture) on past wars in the Balkans, but also on present wars and disasters that affect the lives of young people. Striking this year were the many talks and discussions about violence, especially violence against women, certainly related to the terrible events of this year – the school massacre and rampage in Serbia and the femicide in Gradačac near Tuzla, which emotionally engaged all participants. The motivation of the young people to become active themselves against violence and for a just society was all the stronger. Already during the camp, participants took part in a fifteen-minutes' silence called for by feminist organizations in the countries of the former Yugoslavia.

At the end of July, 50 activists of the Youth United in Peace (YU-Peace) net-

work met near Tuzla for a week-long camp to explore topics such as dealing with the past, reconciliation and peace activism more deeply. This year for the first time, people outside the network had the opportunity to attend workshops at the camp as part of an open house and get to know the network (p. 2).

One of the fundamental ideas of the project, namely that there are always curious young people who do not trust despite propaganda and hatred and nevertheless, or precisely because of this, want to get to know the "other" side, was once again reaffirmed at the Palestinian-Israeli Women Dialogue Seminar. Despite the current political situation which in the West Bank is characterized by daily violent attacks by the Israeli military and settlers and in Israel by tightening of laws by a radical right-wing government and protests against it, 41 Palestinian and Israeli Women came together near Cologne for a controversial and powerful dialogue.

Although the team had been almost completely reorganized and there were various last-minute changes this year, the dialogue process, including the certainly desired frictions, went surprisingly well. For the first time this year, Is-

raeli coordination was able to invite some Orthodox Jewish women for the Dialogue Seminar – their voices enriched the process with important perspectives (p.3). You will be able to read more about this in our annual report next spring.

Also, the dialogue work of our partner organization Seekers (name changed) has been ongoing continuously throughout the year:

the group of long-time activists meeting throughout the last months decided to on the one hand, establish a presence in social media in order to influence society in this way. On the other hand, they have planned their own projects in small groups, which they will now turn into action.

The search for a partner community as a central meeting point for the Palestinian group of the new Dialogue Triangle remains difficult: As the situation in the West Bank and East Jerusalem continues to deteriorate, there are even greater reservations within the communities to host such a group. For this reason, Seekers is now increasingly trying to tie in with communities that have already been active in the past rather than partnering with a new community.

LEARNING FROM EACH OTHER AND CONNECTING: “CREATING A COMMEMORATIVE CULTURE OF MUTUAL RESPECT”

(Text: Vlasta Markovic) “If someone had told me that I would sleep in a tent, shower outside and be cold in the middle of July, and that this would be the best camp ever, I wouldn’t have believed them”, said one of the participants of this

lent Communication in Bosnia and Herzegovina. We discussed whether nonviolent communication can be the key to reconciliation and talked about different types of violence and how and why conflicts arise.



Listening eagerly: Participants attending the workshop on the concept and methods of non-violent communication

year’s week-long camp for activists of the Youth United in Peace (YU-Peace) network in Tuzla.

We accommodated participants in tents on the slopes of Majevisa Mountain, which is located in the vicinity of Tuzla. Only thirty years before, on the other side, there was a so-called “line of division”, which was the scene of various war events. This was another reason why we decided to hold the camp on the slopes of Majevisa, in order to organize a beautiful, positive event in this place.

This time the camp was a camp in the literal sense – we slept in tents and were in nature. We wanted to bring the participants closer to each other through this – fortunately, we succeeded. (...)

The workshop with which we started our camp was led by Selma Teparić and Lariša Mujačić from the Network for Nonvio-

In addition, we learned the steps of non-violent communication and strategies that we can use in everyday conflicts. Although nonviolent communication is not the only key to reconciliation, we found that it is a big step to start with oneself, to give yourself empathy so that you can give it to others. (...) As the camp went on, we very often referred to what we learned in that first workshop and to the fact that the most important tool in any conflict is communication. (...)

The workshop in the afternoon of the next day focused on the personal stories of the team members Vlasta Marković from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Valerija Forgić from Serbia and Dijana Antunović-Lazić and Maja Buljubašić from Croatia.

We wanted participants to learn how the people who organize different camps for

them today, and who have been working together for many years, experienced the war and what consequences the war events had on their lives, their parents and their children. So, we talked about how we had to leave our homes and flee to safer places, which, as it turned out, were not so safe at all, because there was no food anywhere. We talked about how our families were in contact with their relatives and how they were partly on the front lines, partly became refugees; how they survived the shelling and what it means for them today to deal with these issues and talk about them. (...)

In another workshop, Azir Osmanović, who survived the genocide in Srebrenica at the age of 13, shared part of his life story with us.

His message was: “You, who are eager for knowledge, who want to know your society better, to know better those with whom and next to whom you live, by participating in this and similar programs, give us all hope that it is possible to build a new and better society, freed from the heavy burden imposed on you by the generations before you. My generation has experienced many sufferings, lived through all the horrors and cruelties of war, faced many challenges in the most difficult times, and preserved the memory of terrible suffering and pain. By listening to us, learning from us, not hating but thinking soberly, you can save this society and help create a commemorative culture of mutual appreciation and respect. Learn, respect each other, respect the other and the different, appreciate you’re the team leaders, be persistent and patient, and you will succeed. I wish you all the best!”

Today, Azir lives and works in Srebrenica. At the Počari Memorial, he has chosen to devote his life to spreading his story, even though this means reliving his story over and over again. Azir always brings us positive energy, because although he has lived through very great losses, he does not carry hatred, but only the desire

that such things never happen again to anyone, anywhere. (...)

On the last day of the camp we had an open day where some of our former members joined us, as well as some young people who were not part of our story till now and wanted to hear and see how a camp works. Together with our

participants, they attended the workshop “Peace activism in the nineties”. In this workshop we talked about movements, but also about “ordinary people from next door” who clearly and loudly said NO to war (...). (...)

That day, we were also joined by a guest from Montenegro, with whom we talked about a potential new collaboration, and

we hope that another group of young people from the region will join us next year.

“WHY ARE YOU HERE?”

WHAT MOTIVATES PEOPLE TO PARTICIPATE IN DIALOGUE SEMINARS

“I had two two main reasons to participate in this seminar: first, I was recently in Hebron and the West Bank for the first time, and second, the current situation with the Israeli government and [judicial] reform. These two things opened my eyes I felt a calling to meet and speak to Palestinians”, writes Rotem (name changed), an Israeli participant in the two-week dialogue seminar in Walberberg near Cologne, Germany, which once again brought together courageous Israelis and Palestinians this summer.

In view of the current extremely difficult political situation in Israel and Palestine, many people wonder why people still

participate in dialogues at all. Motivations can be manifold, as the following statement show.

One of the few preconditions for participation in these open-ended dialogues is the willingness of the participants to speak to the “other side” and to listen to each other. No agreements or symbolic gestures of reconciliation are expected, nor is the dialogue process designed in a way that would virtually force these kinds of gestures. Oftentimes, this precondition coincides with the motivation to come to the seminar: To tell one’s own story, to hear the story of the “other”, to get to know each other.

Nusrin (name changed) from Masafar Yata in the Palestinian West Bank describes it this way: “One reason behind me participating in this seminar is the fact that I wanted to meet the other side, the Israelis. Israelis don’t know that Palestinians live differently from them. I came here to tell the Palestinian stories and to talk about my journey in Masafar Yatta. (...) I see Masafar Yatta as part of the Palestinian narrative that I came here to represent.”

For Duna (name changed), who is a Palestinian living in the territory of Israel, in addition to getting to know the other participants and her need to talk about violence against Palestinians within Israel, the desire to understand the Israeli narrative is paramount: “My motivation for participating was to understand Israeli Jewish narrative and why Israelis as a social and political collective behave the way they do, and why they say what they say in positions as decision makers and authority figures.”

Esther (name changed), who comes from an ultra-Orthodox Hasidic community, writes: “I had never met Palestinian women before and I very much wanted to meet the other side in person, to get to know them and meet them, which I never had the opportunity to do before. (...) It was important for me to hear their personal stories, the emotional experiences. I was also moved by their emotional reactions to the political narrative. I was moved when they told about Shireen Abu Akleh (editor’s note: Pales-



Participants during the Palestinian Narrative presentation



Changing scenery: in between challenging dialogue sessions the group went on an excursion to Cologne

tinian-American journalist who was shot by Israeli soldiers while working in Jenin and about her death, I felt the personal connection they had with her. I felt the pain.”

This year, Ella, an Israeli participant, asked herself self-critically to what extent it is really justified that Palestinians (have to) tell their often-traumatic stories over and over again in order to show Israelis the reality of their political lives: “When we were asked at the preparation meeting why we wanted to go to the seminar, many women said to meet Palestinians. Of course, I also wanted to meet them and I am glad I met them, but that is not the reason why I came. I meet Palestinians every day. (...) I have friends from the West Bank, and it is not necessary for them to come here and tell me their personal stories so that I know what is going on. I really appreciate that, (...) but partly I also wonder, why do they have to go through this for us? Why do we have to put them in this place? (...)”

In the selection of participants – which is made by local partners – it is important to us as a dialogue project that the group is as diverse as possible, both in terms of the social and economic status of participants as well as regarding their political backgrounds.

This diversity of the group is also reflected in the different motivations; Ella describes her actual motivation as follows: “I wanted to learn more, to have more tools. (...) I also wanted to come here to see if I could actually talk and first of all if I could actually have compassion. The-

re was a point in my life when I said to myself: 'I don't want to be Israeli (...),' [until] I understood that it's not right, I can't exclude myself from it. I am Israeli. I am part of all these things that I hate and I resist, but in order to really do that I need to have more compassion for myself and for my potential friends and partners (...). So, I also came here to learn how to express my opinions because I never went to university (...). Six months ago, I did this course at the organization Zochrot in Israel and I remember hearing all these terms like 'settler colonialism' (...) but they are so academic and the left in Israel is so white and privileged, and there I realized that I am less privileged and I felt that there. (...) [I also came to the seminar to learn] how to talk to my people, how to speak to Israelis, who I want to be partners in the struggle.”

While some women like Ella were already active against the conflict and the occupation before the seminar, for others, the experience of the dialogue process is the occasion to question their own society and inherent power relations for the first time or even to become active themselves – be it among friends and acquaintances or in already existing initiatives or political groups.

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