

COMMITTEE FOR BASIC RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY
and
BOSNIAN-INITIATIVE

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Dear Benefactors and friends

December 2001

We want to thank you for your donations to "Vacation from War" last summer. Together with the "Committee for Basic Rights and Democracy" we could organize summer camps for about 1700 children from all parts of the former Yugoslavia.. The children were able to recuperate from their war experiences and to enjoy themselves. Whenever possible, the children were together with their so called "enemies".

We are especially happy and proud that last summer Albanian and Slavic Macedonian children went together to Lake Ohrid and enjoyed "Vacation from War" while war escalated in their home villages. For example, Romanovce is a small village in the north of Macedonia where all around fighting between UCK and the Macedonian army took place. All parents, Albanians and Slavic as well as Turkish and Roma (gypsy) minorities, decided to send their children together to Lake Ohrid as a symbol of resistance against hatred and propaganda.

Our impression was that this war is a fight between a corrupt Slavic power elite and the terroristic Albanian UCK (supported by Western States), with whom most people on both sides are not involved. There was no atmosphere of patriotism or nationalism at all. To organize these camps we worked together with the world's first "Children's embassy in Skopje.

Another extraordinary meeting again was a group of Muslim children who were deported from Srebrenica to Tuzla in 1995. They enjoyed their holidays together with Serb children now living in Srebrenica as refugees.

Up to now it was not possible to organize camps for Albanian and Serbian children from Kosovo together in one group. We hope this can take place next summer. Some teachers from both sides from Mitrovica, a divided town in the north of Kosovo where battles are still going on, will have their first meeting with each other next spring. You cannot believe how delicate this is. To give you an impression, we attach a letter from Stephanie Perrott to her friends. She worked in Mitrovica for one year before she organized the children's camps.

These days we dream of organizing "Vacations from War" for children from Manhattan and Kabul or from Israel and Palestine. We regret that we are not able to do this, because we are convinced that these camps are not just an opportunity to recover. They also help prevent future conflict.

Two years ago some of you supported our purchase of a house in Tuzla where the "PeaceCenter Simin Han" is now functioning. Every week 120 widows who fled from Eastern Bosnia (Srebrenica, Zvornik) meet, talk, learn and laugh there. In the afternoon the school organizes extra courses for disadvantaged children. At night adults can take special training courses such as computers, haircutting, bookkeeping, and so forth. To help them survive the winter, we buy every family two sacks of potatoes and cabbage.

The most difficult problem for these families now is that the owners of the houses where these families have lived since the war are returning from abroad to reclaim their property. Many women and children simply don't know where to go.

If you would like to support the Peace Center, please send contributions to the Bosnian Initiative, c/o Katha Pollitt, The Nation, 33 Irving Place, New York, NY 10003, or directly to us in Frankfurt.

In the spring, we will again ask for donations for the summer camps.

Thank you so much for your support

Yours sincerely

Helga Dieter