

Helga Dieter wrote a letter to her friend and journalist Katha Pollitt, who often asked for donations under her column in the „nation”, concerning the plans and problems of the “Vacation from War” Campaign summer 2002

Dear Katha Pollitt,

Thank you for your involvement.

The plans for this summer are more or less what I wrote in the last letter to your donators (see attachment).

You asked especially for the Kosova-Camps and the plans for meetings of people from Israel and Palestine. Both are extremely difficult.

1. Officially it is forbidden for people from Palestine to meet people from Israel. For Israelis it is officially not forbidden but in reality because there are strict rules of bureaucracy and control that makes it impossible. Therefore no peace-organisation can plan such meetings these days. I think we are flexible enough to make it possible with young people from both sides, who are invited to Germany and meet here „by chance“. To make this public could be contraproductive. That is the reason why we just publish: „We plan such meetings with all thinkable efforts but because of the political situation we don't know whether it can take place.
But if it is extremely expensive -we should be prepared.
2. The recreation-camps for children from Palestine we planned in Jordania, Libanon or Egypt are not possible in the moment because Palestinian people are not allowed to travel anywhere. One of our partner-organisations in Bethlehem for handicaped and traumatized children just was bombed. Noone was hurt but the building and the infrastructure was destroyed. We now stay in contact with a private e-mail-adresss. Nevertheless they plan „Vacatian from War“, at least games, picnics, theater-visits and so on at home. There are other partner-organisations in Bethlehem and Eastern-Jerusalem who would like to organize such Vacation-Games. But even this is not sure because –maybe- there are no vacations. All schools in Palestine are closed since months because of the war. It could happen that there are no holidays this summer and most of the children are happy to go to school during the regular vacation-time. In this case we have to think first time about a project „Vacations in School“. This is a contradiction in itself – but nothing is impossible in this project.

Altogether we hope that the project on the Balkan can take place with 14 camps like last year,

3. Up to now in Kosovo meetings between Albanians and Serbs, who now live in UN-protected enclaves, are not possible. This is extremely in the divided City of Mitrovica. Last year we had a separate group of the Serbian North and a group of the Albanian South. This year our strict condition was: We give people who have the courage to meet “the others” the opportunity or we leave it. But this seems not possible. The compromise now is: The Serbs from Mitrovica in the north meet Albanians from Orahovac from South-Kosovo and theAlbanians from Mitrovica meet Serbs from another part of Kosovo. For us this is a compromise but for the conditions in the UN-protected Kosovo it is revolutionary. We plan three groups going to the beach in Montenegro, each with sixty children.

4. Another three extremely difficult groups are planned in Macedonia. Last spring and summer there was a Civil War between Albanians (UCK) and the "regular" army with victims on both sides. Nevertheless 200 children from the war-district took part together in the meeting „Vacations from war" on the lake Ohrid.
5. Six „easier" camps are planned in Zivogosce/Croatia
 - Osijek-Sombor
The „Peace-Center Osijek" fights for reconciliation of Croatian refugees and the civil-rights of the Serb minority in Croatia (Slavonia). They come with 60 children together with 60 Serbs from Sombor, the first city that was bombed by the NATO 1999, though this part of Serbia (Vojvodina) was known to be opposite to the Milosovic-system.
 - Srebrenica-Tuzla
The third year 60 Muslim children and women, who were deported from Srebrenica, come together with 60 Serb children, now living in Srebrenica as refugees (from the Sarajevo-area). In my knowledge what was going on in these wars this is the most difficult camp but up to now there were no problems.
 - Zvornik-Simin-Han
This is more or less the same. The school in Simin Han with 90% refugees from Srebrenica/Zvornik builds a partnership with the school in Zvornik (Now Serbian Republic). 60 children from each side are meeting again.
 - Tuzla+Banja Luka+Gornji Vakuf (3 camps!!!)
Each of the three camps brings together 120 children. 40 are coming from Banja Luka (20 Serbs, 10 from the Croatian minority, 10 from the Muslimic minority);, 40 from Tuzla (mostly Muslim), 40 from Gornji Vakuf (half Croatian Catholics, half Muslims). These camps are very successful because for many participants the ethnic and the personal identity become in diffusion.

I'm not sure this was transparent enough. We can't guarantee anything.-
But we'll do our best

So long
Greetings from Helga