

Responsible for the Project "Vacation from War"

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**Committee for Basic Rights
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Frankfurt, Germany

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**Call for Donations for the
Campaign 'Vacation from War'
Steps toward the Concrete Utopia of a Peaceful World
2005 Vacation Sponsorships for Refugee Children and Youth
from the War Zones in the former Yugoslavia and the Middle East**

Under the auspices of the Committee for Basic Rights and Democracy's campaign 'Vacation from War', more than 17,000 children and youth from war zones have met to share their vacation time over the past eleven years. The children come from Bosnia, Croatia, Macedonia, Kosovo and Serbia, all states with a very bitter and fresh memory of civil wars. Local peace committees cooperate with the Committee in order to give the kids a good time. For all of them it is the first time to meet the 'others' who in their home countries are still regarded as enemies. It is remarkable how fast these children play, dance and sing together but also talk about their fate and mourn together, ignoring borders and prejudices.

Since summer 2002 the 'Committee' also organized and financed encounters for 370 young people from Israel and Palestine (Westbank!). Another 200 students have been invited to Germany for summer 2005--such encounters still being completely unthinkable in the Middle East.

In a letter to the donors the participants described their gratitude and the difficult process they had to go through.

"...This seminar was a unique experience. What is seldom possible for us under our daily circumstances was granted here: we shared with each other our thoughts, our points of view and daily lives with great sincerity. Though almost all of us were born and raised in Israel/Palestine. For many this meeting was the first opportunity to have met a flesh-and-blood person from the other side. The atmosphere in the seminar was one of mutual respect, understanding, and a sense of equality. Different topics were discussed, such as the economical and cultural differences in our every-day lives, issues of human rights conditions, the historical perspective and other deeply relevant and affecting issues..."

In this situation the humanitarian care and the peace dialogue have invaluable significance. To come to know one other in an atmosphere full of empathy and joy may help to heal the deep psychological and physical wounds and to overcome prejudices. Young people who are moved by this experience will tell their families and friends what happened to them.

Beyond that, vacation games for children are once more planned in Palestinian cities and refugee camps.

Please support this exemplary project in the politics of peace. Urge your friends to participate. Thank you for your efforts.

Helga Dieter

One sponsorship is \$130. There are also collections at celebrations, at charity events, etc. If you want to support the campaign "Vacation from War" please make out a check to „Committee - Vacation from War" and send it to Helga Dieter, Flussgasse 8, D- 60489 Frankfurt / Germany. Or send the grant to the Account (inside Europe without fees): Komitee, Nr. 8013055 Volksbank Odenwald, International Zip: Iban De 34508635130008013055, BIC-Code Genode 51 MIC

188 pleas for an Israeli-Palestinian Dialogue

Over the past three years, under the auspices of the project known as "Vacation from the War", 185 young people from Israel and 185 from the West Bank in Palestine lived, talked, listened, debated, mourned, celebrated and laughed together.

In some groups we asked the participants to spontaneously and briefly write down their impressions. Of the 191 statements we received, 188 approve, for the most part enthusiastically, the 'dialogue between the enemies'; three were critical of it.

There has been no comparable project in this scale and intensity in recent years. This documentation is hence unique, proof that hope for peace in the Middle East is growing with the younger generation.

(You can download the whole documentation: www.vacation-from-war.com).

Some examples:

- I never in my life met a Palestinian person. The only time I saw them was on TV. All my life I was scared of people who live near me and speak Arabic. I right away connected them to the hate they have towards all Israelis. Here I came to know that first of all they are human beings before any political masks. I got to understand here what is really going on in the West Bank...
I know this seminar costs a lot of money and effort...but it is really worth it!
L. (male, Israeli, August 2002)*
- It was the first time that I talked to an Israeli. I learned so much about their society and the way they think. Before I had some horrible thoughts about them. But after several meetings some of my thoughts have changed. I found out that they know about our tragedy, and I really liked that they confessed their responsibility for some issues. I did really have fun her; I hope to meet more Israelis the coming years.
N. (17 years, female, Palestinian, August 2002)*
- When they told me about this trip it took me a lot of time to decide: How can I sit with those people who kill mine every day? How can I meet them -after all the difficulties I face every day while going to my work -all that fear of death or losing work? But at least I wanted to meet them to find a solution even if we were so far from it...I am sure that the first step must be on the Israeli side. Right now the Palestinians are kept in prison waiting for nothing. But if something really happens from the other side they will get back their hope.
NN. (Palestinian, August 2002)*
- These two weeks were a great experience for me. At first this meeting gave me the opportunity to meet Palestinians Second, it enabled me to visit Germany. This wasn't a simple experience for me as I'm Jewish, and the past for the Jews in Germany is something that I still have problems to cope with. I found out a lot about myself. I found out what it means to be a minority. I found out what a racist society we are living in. Thank you: Keep up this good and important work.
(NN, Israeli, August 2004)*
- I came to this seminar with a lot of fear. I thought that I meet here murderers, people that only understand violence, people you can't talk with. But still, since I believe in peace, I came. In spite of the fact that a few of my best friends died in this conflict by a suicide-bomber -and maybe because of that- I believe that there is no other way: We must talk with each other! Now I know that these people, the Palestinian people, are really similar to us. They also want the same simple things in life -peace, love and happiness. The problem is that we both want the same land. Now after the seminar I believe: It is possible to live together.
H. (27 years, female, Israeli, August 2004)*
- When I was offered this journey, I could hardly believe it because I was in a difficult occupation situation and I hadn't expected to see a happy day again because of the destruction of my house and the killing of the sons of my sister and my uncle by the hand of the Israeli army. In Germany I could experience democracy and liberty and the feeling of being a respected person. I would like to thank everyone who gave us the opportunity to get to know each other and the new hope that came with it!
S. (27 years, male, Palestine, August 2004)*
- I came with a plan to fight. I'm going back with a plan to love.
G. (24 years, female, Palestinian, August 2004)*
- The time of the journey and the separation is there. The air is full of longing. I wished time would stop. For a moment of peace. I wished we could remain together.
NN (Palestinian, August 2003)*