

Committee for Fundamental Rights and Democracy + Bosnian Initiative

Coordination of the Project Vacation from War

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A Call for Donations for the Campaign

Vacation from War

**Steps toward the Concrete Utopia of a Peaceful World
Sponsoring Vacation Camps for Refugee Children and Youth
from the War Zones in the former Yugoslavia and the Middle East**

Dear Benefactors and Friends of the project Vacation from War,

Over the past 14 years, through the `Vacation from War` campaign 19,500 children and teens from crisis regions and war zones in the Balkans spent mutual holidays on a Mediterranean beach. In addition more than 1,000 young people from Israel and Palestine have encountered one another in shared holidays in Germany. They all have spent two weeks in summer camps with their supposed enemies, eating at the same table, laughing, talking, and sometimes grieving together.

Encounters between young people from the former enemy states in the Balkans are – aside from our vacation program – still extraordinarily rare. For most of the kids it is the first time to meet the ‘others’. It is remarkable how fast these youngsters play, dance and sing together but also talk about their fate, ignoring borders and prejudices.

Since the departure of most aid organizations from the Balkans, material needs have only increased and United Nations' officials have either been unable or unwilling to implement peace-oriented pedagogical programs in the schools.

Young people from Israel, who took an oath to themselves never to step into Germany went there in order to meet the ‘Arab terrorists’, by whom they feel threatened every day. Young people from Palestine came with enormous difficulties in order to meet their ‘occupiers’. Some of them got around the curfew and the checkpoints in a most risky and dangerous manner in order to get to the airport in Jordan. On both sides the young people were taking a big risk, for they could be denounced for collaborating with the enemy or as traitors of the fatherland, with very serious consequences like social exclusion and, on the Palestinian side, even physical attacks.

We are unaware of any other project in which Jewish youth from Israel and Palestinians from the West Bank are able to live together under one roof for two weeks and, through an intensive process of mutual listening and debate, get to know and understand the perspective of the other and learn to enjoy and value the others' company.

In the summer of 2008, we plan encounters for 400 young people from Bosnia, Croatia, Serbia, Macedonia and Kosovo. We also wish to invite 180 young people from Israel and Palestine to come to Germany, to make possible an encounter that would be impossible in the Middle East. The second time we plan an encounter between women from Israel and Palestine.

**Please support this unique peace-making and humanitarian grassroots project.
Please donate a sponsorship of \$150 or collect shares in schools, congregations, etc.
We can send you additional information (www.vacation-from-war.com).
Please copy this call for donations, and distribute it!**

Please make out a check to Vacation from War and send it to

- Helga Dieter, Flussgasse 8, D- 60489 Frankfurt / Germany or to
- Katha Pollitt, c/o The Nation, 33 Irving Place, New York, NY 10003
- Your bank can also transmit your donation to the account: Receiver's correspondent: BIC: BKTRUS33, Deutsche Bank Trust Company Americas, NYC, FW: 021001033, Intermedia Bank (field 56a) GENODEFF, DZ Bank AG, Frankfurt, Germany, Beneficiary Bank (field 57a): GENODE51MIC. Volksbank Odenwald eG, Frankfurter Str. 1, 64720 Michelstadt, Beneficiary (field 59) Account No. DE34508635130008013055, Komitee fuer Grundrechte, 50670 Koeln, Germany

Most US-donors succeed in having their donations recognized as tax deductions for charitable giving with the German certificate which we will send in spring 2009.



own life stories through the mirror images found in the biographies of their supposed enemies. Some have discovered that "the others" share their stories down in the most gruesome detail.

The children and teens come from **Bosnia, Croatia, Macedonia, Kosovo and Serbia**, all states with a very bitter and fresh memory of civil wars. The living conditions in the new states of the former Yugoslavia became worse and worse since the NGO-caravan moved on to new battlefields. In addition to existence threatening poverty and loss of perspective, ever further crises have continued to shake the fragile peace. Many young people emigrated in order to feed their families at home. European countries, especially Germany, expelled 500,000 refugees from Bosnia. This caused a lot of economical and social problems in Bosnia, especially for the great number of internal expellees. Many of the widows from Srebrenica, for example, were forced to return to their 'homes', mostly ruins, now often in a hostile neighbourhood, sometimes right beside their tormentors. Many people lost hope for a new and better society.

The unique causes of conflict distinguish the various fighting regions from one another; however the spiraling escalation into violence and the decline of civility in both private and civic affairs, as well as the tragic history of fear, humiliation, sadism, crime, and murder of the closest friends, neighbours and relatives are all shared experiences. Through this program, children and young people of the same age who have experienced similar disruption in their lives can meet together in a safe and comfortable environment. Sometimes they are only able to understand their



In divided towns in Croatia and Bosnia different schools for the Ethnic groups still exist – often in the same building. The United Nations' officials have either been unable or unwilling to implement mutual schools or any kind of peace education. In the summer camps students and teachers can experience that it is possible to live and learn together. The youngsters printed t-shirts with the slogan: Why point out differences? and wore it on both sides in the schools.

situation escalated again. The UN troops lost control and couldn't protect the Serbian enclaves. Oil is once again being thrown on the flames because 'the West' has been supporting the independence movement of the Albanian majority. The consequence is that the neighboring state of Macedonia is being de-

The situation in Kosovo is like the top of a volcano. From time to time the

stabilized through a portion of the Albanian minority there who wish to be annexed to the new state. Political chain reactions reaching as far as Bosnia could follow. A fragile peace, which has been maintained by massive force, is in danger. Despite this explosive environment, every year young Albanians, Roma (Gypsies), and Serbs from southern Kosovo travelled together to the Montenegro seaside. Not only did they come there, like similar groups in previous years, to make holidays together, but they came to take part in peace-pedagogical workshops to discuss the prospects of a common future.

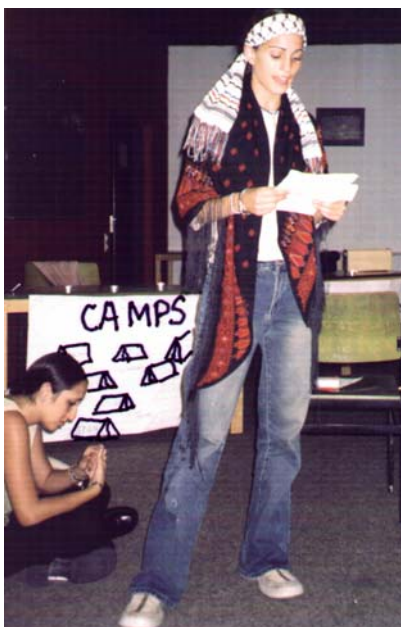


It is very exceptional when Albanian or Serbian parents agree to let their children go for holidays together. It is remarkable how fast these youngsters play and dance together or talk about their fate, ignoring borders and prejudices. These encounters still are unique.

During the battle in **Macedonia** in one group the children created a peace appeal addressed to the adults on both sides in order to stop the fighting. We translated this 'mission' in several languages and

discussed it in the summer camps. To spread this peace appeal from children in crisis areas and war-zones and to collect signatures was the first active political step for most of the participants. About 15,000 children and youngsters from six countries signed the peace-appeal You can see it on the internet (www.vacation-from-war.com).

Since the summer of 2002 the Committee also organized and financed encounters for young people from Israel and Palestine (Westbank) in Germany



The Palestinian group shows the fate of the refugees in a sketch. On a Friday night young people from Israel and Palestine are preparing chalah together, the special bread for the Jewish dinner ceremony.

It seemed unlikely that we would be able to realize this project, since the war was escalating almost daily. But with many difficulties we succeeded even during the Lebanon war. Such encounters are still 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. (vacation-from-war.com). The groups remain in contact by e-mail and try to meet from time to time in Jerusalem. For some of the participants from Palestine this is extremely difficult or impossible.

In Israel and Palestine many people, even peace activists from both sides, don't see the sense in dialogue projects anymore. This motivated us to ask the participants to write down what impressions and experiences they made during the meeting. A paper with 188 Pleas for an Israeli-Palestinian Dialogue is an impressive document that proves the value of the dialogue process. (www.vacation-from-war.com).



In summer 2007 the first encounter between women from Israel and Palestine took place.

As in other groups they worked on grassroots peace negotiations without leaving out the delicate problems like: return of the refugees, status of Jerusalem, final borderline.

The facilitator Gili writes:

“I have attended several Israeli-Palestinian seminars, and have always felt that the gender factor influenced the dynamics in and out of the discussion room. The intersection between nationality and gender plays a substantial role in these kinds of seminars, but what happened exceeded even my highest hopes. Something just worked. The participants could

bring the complexities of their lives into the discussion room, and one could feel that alongside the suspicion and fear and tension, there was a lot of respect, sensitivity and, surprisingly, trust.”

Hava Beller is a filmmaker from NYC. Since 2004 she made many efforts to document the process of a Vacation-from-War seminar in a film. But most of the groups didn't agree to be taped together. After three years building on trust she participated in a seminar, and at last she succeeded. In summer 2007 she came with a camera team to Germany and afterwards visited the participants in Israel and Palestine.



Beyond the encounters of about 1000 young people from Israel and Palestine in Germany since 2002, **vacation games enjoyed about 1000 children in Palestinian cities and refugee camps.**

In summer 2007 the money was confiscated by the US authorities, and it took three months until it reached the youth organisation in Nablus.

As you can imagine, organizing this huge project is a lot of work for the small voluntary team from Germany. The project is exclusively financed by private donors and needs about 350,000 € each summer. The administration costs are below 4%.

We know it sounds naive, but nevertheless we are convinced that the best war prevention is if young people from both sides of a conflict spend their holidays together. Who organizes Vacation from War for young people from India and Pakistan, from Ethiopia and Eritrea, from Washington and Baghdad, from New York and Kabul?

For more information see our website: www.vacation-from-war.org and www.ferien-vom-krieg.de