



COALITION FOR WORK WITH PSYCHOTRAUMA AND PEACE KOALICIJA ZA RAD SA PSIHOTRAUMOM I MIR

MONTHLY REPORT JANUARY 2019

INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

The region continues to be tense politically. Local and national government take the position, at least publicly, that nothing is wrong. The peace is a negative one, this twenty-one years after the United Nations left and twenty-four years after the Dayton and Erdut peace treaties.

There continues to be virtually no “talk therapy” for people here. We remain the only organization providing it without charge.

Further, the migrant situation in this region and everywhere continues to be inhuman. There are large pushbacks at the Croatian border, and there is much violence. Further, again, virtually no psychological assistance is being given to migrants or those assisting them.

We continue our work with clients. The issue of fathers and their emotional state and their abuse, as well as other childhood abuse, are very important issues. Another is trans-generational transmission of trauma.

We had two groups this month. One was in Split. Another was one that we started online with people in northwest Bosnia.

This month, we wrote a proposal and made an agreement to work with the University of Belgrade with students doing internships, primarily with migrants. That will start in March. We also will give lectures for the University of Olomouc in the Czech Republic sometime in the spring.

Further, we are working with several groups in Bukavu in the Democratic Republic of Congo to start the training of trainers in PET there. This work was slowed by the elections.

We have had inquiries to start several other groups.

We also started with an online group on Facebook on Psychology for Peace. That group will work on bottom-up capacity building.

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At the end of the month, we heard of the death of the Quaker human rights lawyer Erik Hummels in the Netherlands. We mourn the loss of this very human and committed man.

SITUATION IN THE REGION

The year began with tensions in Vukovar twenty-one years after the official completion of UN's operation entitled "Peaceful Reintegration". It is obviously that the peace process is not finished. The region is still far away from positive peace. The problem of violence targeting members of one or another ethnic community is not new. There are people who constantly are stoking up an atmosphere of war and who treat and portray any demands by the Serb community for rights that belong to them under the constitution and other laws and international agreements as an attack on the constitutional order and as aggression.

By posting a video on the local government website of ethnic Serb secondary school students who did not stand up for the Croatian national anthem at a football match played in Vukovar, Vukovar Mayor Ivan Penava violated the Children's Wellbeing Act, the International Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Personal Data Act, and other laws, further inciting an atmosphere of violence.

In the past several weeks alone, we have witnessed a number of incidents, starting with a hideous Facebook post by Josip Djakić, for which he was only slapped on the wrist, in which children in Vukovar were being used in a cowardly fashion for political and national disputes along ethnic lines. Other situations included incidents, insults, and foul language in Parliament. This is the mirror of Croatia today. Violence, chauvinism, and hatred have become the Croatian brand.

On the occasion of the International Day of Remembrance of Holocaust Victims, a prayer-commemorative gathering was organized by the Zagreb Archdiocese and the Hatikva Jewish Information and Educational Centre in front of the Zagreb Cathedral.

In the seventy-four years since the end of the Holocaust, the Jewish world has been duly concerned by the Catholic Church of Croatia's glorification of Ustasha nationalists and the horrific crimes that they carried out in collaboration with the Nazis, and by its repeated tendencies to whitewash the tragedy endured by the Jewish community and other minorities during World War II. In the current climate of rising anti-Semitism and Holocaust revisionism in Europe, it is essential that the Catholic Church of Croatia lead the way in coming to terms with the crimes of its countrymen and ensure that its perpetrators are not rehabilitated in any way. Bishop Bozanić said that it is entirely unacceptable to allow any form of anti-Semitism to be awakened today, although such ideologies exist even now.

The migrant crisis continued, particularly on the border with Bosnia and Herzegovina, with the police employing ever harsher measures to control the borders and NGOs publishing increasingly critical reports about the alleged police violence and irregularities. The police have repeatedly denied any wrongdoing, despite video evidence to the contrary. Further, NGOs have less and less access to official centers for migrants.

Generally speaking, there has been very little change in the psychological state of people in the period that we have been in the region. We are the only organization in the region offering assistance on psychological traumatization, this without charge. The importance of mental health and wellbeing is still undervalued and stigmatized.

EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

Introduction

We have continued with clients, groups, and supervision. We are attempting to work on the migrant situation, and have started an online group in northwest Bosnia. We also have written a plan that has been approved to work with the University of Belgrade through assisting students who will become interns with us. Additionally, we will give online seminars for students of development at the University of Olomouc in the Czech Republic in the spring. Further, we are pursuing work in the Democratic Republic of Congo. We hope to do at least some work in South Africa later in the year.

Clients

Client work continued as usual. The main issues involved were those of parents, particularly fathers. There were several cases that involved the sexual abuse of the clients when they were children by family members and others. Another major issue was the trans-generational transmission of trauma. We are encouraging all clients to face their traumas and to process them. We encourage any method that gets emotions out, such as writing, drawing, etc. and we discourage the use of drugs.

Groups

Split

The Split education group continues.

Northwest Bosnia

In the middle of the month, we began a group with volunteers in the Velika Kladuša-Bihač region using Zoom. The conditions under which they are working are severe, as is the amount of violence that they are encountering. We will continue that group for the foreseeable future. They have asked us to travel to them and work with them there, and we will do so at some point in the future. Until now, the group was not getting psychological supervision. The need for work with migrants in that region is enormous.

Supervision

We carried out psychological supervision one person in Split and another in South Africa. These are going well. We would like to see both in person. This is dependent on time and funds.

Migrant Work

The primary work that we have done this month is with the proposal for the University of Belgrade and the Northwest Bosnia Group.

The University of Belgrade

We have written a plan for work with students who will work as interns with migrants and others with psychological traumatic issues. We expect this work to begin in March.

University of Olomouc, Czech Republic

We agreed that we will give online seminars to students of development in the spring.

Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

We continued and finalized the proposal for a group in Bukavu, together with a representative of the Friends Evangelical Church. He also has spoken with the Peace and Reconciliation Project and others. The situation in the DRC was tense during January because of the elections. We expect to work further with them.

Global Psychosocial Network

The meeting this month was a general one. We continue as members of GPN.

The Meeting of the Working Group on Psychology and Peace

The aim of this meeting was to form a working group on bottom-up work and capacity building. We have decided to have extensive email discussions and to work on a “proof of concept” project. We will have online discussions every two-three weeks.

Miscellaneous

We received an inquiry from a cultural translator who wants training. We asked him to form a group.

At the end of the month we received notice of the death of Erik Hummels, an exemplary Quaker human rights lawyer from The Netherlands. Erik was a man of great humanity and someone who thought about peacebuilding and humanity deeply. Although we hadn't seen him in many years, he was often in our thoughts. He will be missed.

INTERNAL AFFAIRS

Finances

This month, we received notice that several large contributions will arrive soon. We are searching urgently for funding sources for 2020 and beyond.

PROSPECTS FOR THE COMING MONTHS

We will continue to work with clients and groups. The migrant situation concerns us greatly, particularly the situation in this region. We also will work on furthering the projects in the Democratic Republic of Congo and elsewhere.