



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

### MONTHLY REPORT FEBRUARY 2020

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#### **INTRODUCTION AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

We are working very hard now. We are starting new groups. The demand for our work is high and increasing. Unfortunately, there are very few if any other groups doing what we are doing with similar philosophies. We very much enjoy the work with groups and clients.

The inaugural speech of the new president of Croatia, Zoran Milanović, was encouraging. He spoke about fighting corruption, about scientific and judicial independence, and about creating unity between the various ethnic groups in Croatia. Unfortunately, many people in the country oppose these principles for their own interests.

We had seven clients this month. The issues were the usual ones, namely unresolved childhood trauma continuing into adulthood compounded by the additional effects of the war. We had one volunteer from a non-governmental organization who was burned out by the experience and two people who found us online.

We continued to work with Snehalaya in India, supporting their work with the children of sex workers and other disadvantaged children, many of whom have HIV.

We started work with two groups in the Democratic Republic of Congo, one in Kinshasa working with people on the street and another in the eastern Congo working with child soldiers. A long-time friend is assisting us with interpretation in French.

Further we started online supervision and education with the suicide prevention group, Životna Linija (Life Line) in Zagreb.

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Additionally, we are now working on supervision and education with NaTakallam, which is a group that is part of Peace by Chocolate, which is based in Nova Scotia, Canada. This is a social enterprise working with refugees who teach others language. These refugees live in a variety of regions and give lessons online. We are encountering the expected issues of the refugees, as well as burnout, which also is expected.

We continue supervision with Alphonse Kanda in South Africa and Ivan Maslow in Split. We have started supervision with another man in Split who is working on being a barefoot therapist.

The migrant situation continues to worsen, particularly in southeastern Europe. During the last days of February, a large new wave of migration began from Syria and Turkey. We are very much afraid of the consequences for the migrants. Further, people assisting migrants are being criminalized. As one example, several volunteers from No Name Kitchen in Šid were banned from Serbia for a period of six months. We fear for what will happen in the coming months. We also fear the consequences of not working with traumatization in the regions of reception.

We did a small amount of work on the second course in the Pragmatic Empowerment Training (PET) series, namely that on communication. We also are in the process of translating the first course, namely that on the caregiver-client relationship and self-care, into Croatian/Serbian/Bosnian.

At the February meeting of the Global Psychosocial Network (GPN), Alphonse Kanda gave a summary of his work in South Africa. He also brought up the issue of the isolation of practitioners in the field, which is an important one for us.

Further, we gave an interview to Professor Emeritus Metta Spencer and participated in one of her online town meetings.

We also participated in a meeting on practical aspects of work with the Psychology of Peace Facebook group.

We greatly thank our long-term anonymous donor from the USA for his continued support. We continue to work hard on fundraising, as the need is very great. Currently, we also are working on proposals for our work in Congo, among other places. While we now know that we can continue to exist for a while, there is a great deal that we want to do, including online work in the Middle East, work on integration of migrants in Western Europe, and work on the online self-paced courses.

It seems that the coming months will be extremely busy for us and that we will be working very hard. We must say that we enjoy the work with groups and clients and writing courses.

### **STATE OF THE REGION**

This month, President Zoran Milanović said in his inauguration speech that elections are a way of reaching a peaceful compromise between the opposed wishes of different people, and that he will play a constructive role as President.

"It seems to me that there is only one right way, and that is full and active support by the government to academic and scientific independence and independence of the judiciary and media. That's the strongest defense against tyranny, tyranny of any kind," he said.

"The scientific community, judiciary and media must work incessantly on perfecting anti-corruption mechanisms. Protection and promotion of the independence of the judiciary, media and science are the most important constitutional responsibilities of the President of the Republic in ensuring the stability of government. " Milanović said.

"Patriotism implies an indelible memory and an eternal gratitude to men, women, and children who were killed and who suffered for freedom both in the 1991-1995 Homeland War and during the antifascist struggle of the Second World War. Patriotism is also awareness of the failures of triumphalism that unfortunately accompanied our victories in the wars, but we should not compare or equate those failures." he said.

Milanović said that the wars are over and that it is our duty and responsibility to ensure that no citizen of Croatia feels intimidated, discriminated against, or in any way excluded just because they are different.

"Our republic needs every person, and every person in Croatia must be given a chance to find their way and their place, to live in dignity from decent work. This is a home to us all, to us who live here and to the generations to come, as well as to those who are yet to return," Milanović said in conclusion of his speech.

Unfortunately, the wider audience was more concerned with the diva and gay icon Josipa Lisac and her performance of national anthem. While Milanović's inaugural speech sounds encouraging, unfortunately, reality is still the opposite.

This month, we strongly condemned the burning of an effigy representing a same-sex couple with a child during the carnival in the southern town of Imotski.

From our field work we continuously received disturbing news about violence and criminalization of humanitarian help to migrants. We see our work as extremely important, despite very little support. In this regard, please also see the section on the migrant situation further on in this report.

Again, we remain one of the very few organizations giving long-term education, supervision, and direct assistance without charge to traumatized people onsite and online.

## EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

### Clients

We had seven clients this month. The issues remain the usual ones, namely unresolved childhood trauma continuing into adulthood compounded by the additional effects of the war. We had one volunteer from a non-governmental organization who was burned out by the experience and two highly traumatized people who found us online. Also, a religious leader from another region has asked to speak with us about working with traumatized people.

### Groups

We continued work giving education and psychological supervision with Snehalaya in India. This is a group working with the children of sex workers. They are starting programs of peer counseling. We are encouraging them to educate their lay caregivers. In addition, we are working with them on individual cases.

We had a very small amount of contact with Fenix, the group of the relatives of people with psychiatric diagnoses in Split this month.

We started an online group with the suicide prevention group Životna Linija (Life Line) in Zagreb. The first few sessions went well.

We have started to work with the group NaTakallam, which is a group teaching refugee languages and is an offshoot of Peace by Chocolate, a social enterprise group started by Syrian refugees, notably Tariq Hadhad, in Nova Scotia, Canada. They connect refugees willing to teach languages with students, online. At present, they are discussing issues of some of the teachers. They also are having issues of secondary traumatization and burnout. We will see them every two weeks.

We have started a group with a group of relatively young people in Kinshasa. They all have a university education and are sensitive. They are working with people on the street. A long-time friend is assisting with interpretation into French.

We also have started a group with people in the eastern Congo, near to the border with Burundi. There are several people in that group who are refugees. They also are working with child soldiers to a certain extent and want to do more of that work. Our long-time friend again is assisting with interpretation into French.

### Supervision

The supervision of Alphonse Kanda in South Africa and Ivan Maslow in Split continued. This month, the supervision was on a low key. We have started a small amount of supervision with another person in Split. He will make a good barefoot therapist. He is working with one client and wants to do more of such work.

### The Migrant Situation

The migrant situation continues to worsen throughout the region and throughout Europe. During the month, a number of volunteers working in Šid with No Name Kitchen and migrants themselves were attacked by anti-migrant paramilitaries, who also destroyed many of the possessions of the migrants. One of the volunteers approached us for psychological assistance, which we are giving. Ironically, it was the volunteers who were condemned and fined by the Serbian courts. Several were banned from entering Serbia for a period of six months.

Similar situations are occurring in Bosnia.

At the end of the month, the hostilities in northwest Syria and Turkey were such that a new wave of migrants is expected. Further, the Turkish government opened their borders to the European Union.

We also continue to hear that the situation in Greece is deteriorating badly.

Further, the Quaker Council for European Affairs has come out with a report strongly condemning the Croatian police for their violent pushbacks of refugees.

All of this gives us great worries. We fear injuries and deaths through these events and these policies in the transit regions. Further, we fear that, without psychological assistance, the current trends toward increased suicides and self-harm among migrants and those working with them will increase. Without psychological assistance – and very little, if any, is being given – the frustration of the migrants will erupt into violence. We also fear this for local residents in the transit regions, and have begun to see it happening.

Still another issue is the integration of migrants in the regions of reception. Again, without psychological assistance, we fear for the physical and mental health of the migrants, which will hinder such integration. We also again fear for violence of the migrants toward themselves, within their own families, within their communities, and to the “outside” world. We consider this a matter of very great urgency.

### Pragmatic Empowerment Training (PET)

We did a small amount of work on the communications course this month.

A volunteer has started the correction of the manual for the first course in Croatian-Serbian-Bosnian and expects to finish it and put it on the website early in March.

### Global Psychosocial Network (GPN)

Alphonse Kanda gave the talk at the February meeting. Aside from his excellent work, he brought up the issue of isolation of practitioners in the field and the need for more work on listening and caring. Also, we heard that a psychologist from Iran will join the group. The discussion of Alphonse's work and its implications will continue at the March meeting.

### Professor Metta Spencer

We gave an interview to Professor Spencer for her series on peacebuilding and participated in one of her online town meetings. She is an emeritus professor of sociology at the University of Toronto and is extensively involved in the peace and climate movements. We will continue contact.

### Miscellaneous

Gwyneth Jones, and the Psychology of Peace Facebook group this month started a monthly meeting in which we participated and in which we will continue to participate. This meeting will concentrate on practical aspects of the work, in particular on training.

## **INTERNAL AFFAIRS**

### Funding and Fundraising

We are grateful to our long-term anonymous donor from the USA for his continued support. While this ensures our continued existence for the coming period, we continue to search for funds. As we have mentioned, we are being asked to work in this region, that is, the Western Balkans, in the Congo, in the Middle East, in integration of migrants in Western Europe, and on our self-paced online series of courses. There is a great deal of work to be done and we are one of the very few organizations with the philosophies and methodologies that we maintain.

### The Website

We made a number of changes to the form of the website this month. We urge readers to have a look at its renewed format.

Further, we have translated significant portions of the website into Croatian/Serbian/Bosnian.

## **PROSPECTS FOR THE COMING MONTHS**

We will continue with groups and clients and will continue to write the PET courses. We also wish to write a document on the lessons learned in the 25 years that we have been in existence. We expect the remainder of the year to be quite busy.