

# Peacebuilding in South Asia and the Western Balkans

Insights from an Unusual Encounter

Bosnia-Herzegovina, March 2022



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## **Peacebuilding in South Asia and the Western Balkans - Insights from an Unusual Encounter**

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# 1. Introduction

People who engage for peacebuilding and human rights around the globe face a number of shared challenges: many of them are working in very complex social and political settings in which peacebuilding rarely proceeds in linear processes but in loops, with deviations and setbacks. As a result, they sometimes feel that they are moving two steps forward and then three steps back. Peacebuilders often see themselves confronted with a Sisyphean challenge and therefore need an extremely high level of self-motivation and resilience to resist frustration. In many places, activists have to cope with harsh opposition or even repression and are constantly weighing up the risks to their own and their families' lives. Most of them are familiar with the feeling of being overloaded and worry that they are running out of time. So why should peace activists from India, Bangladesh, Serbia, North Macedonia and Croatia, who come from very different cultural, socio-political and geographical settings, travel around and come together somewhere in the middle of Bosnia-Herzegovina?

There are several answers to this question. First of all, it seems that even in highly diverse contexts, people share similar experiences in terms of conflict dynamics and obstacles in their efforts to (re-)construct the social fabric and relationships that have been destroyed by war and atrocities. Furthermore, exchange offers the opportunity to shift perspectives. Talking and comparing the different situations opens minds, so activists can learn from each other. At the same time, they gain incentives for self-reflection. Explaining their own context to people from other regions is a challenge but lays the ground for questioning and improving their own approaches. And finally, listening to experiences from other parts of the world makes people aware that they are not alone with their problems and others might offer alternative methods of coping with setbacks and dilemmas.

The encounter within the "South Asia – Western Balkans – Peacebuilding Exchange" project took place in Bosnia-Herzegovina from 26 March to 2 April 2022. It was conceptualised and organised by the Centre for Nonviolent Action, an NGO with 25 years of experience in regional peacebuilding, based in Sarajevo (BiH) and Belgrade (Serbia). The encounter was funded by Brot für die Welt (Development Service of the Protestant Churches in Germany), which has supported several similar meetings with religious and secular peacebuilding organisations in the past decade. Nine peace activists from the region of former Yugoslavia, six from South Asia (India and Bangladesh) and two representatives from Brot für die Welt (Berlin, Germany) participated in the event. There were ten women and seven men in total. The activists came from the Institute

for Social Democracy (India), United NGOs Mission Manipur (UNMM), Centre for Women and Girls in Manipur (India), Maleya Foundation (Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh), Peace Action (North Macedonia), Centre for Human Rights and Conflict Resolution (North Macedonia), Serb National Council (Croatia), Helsinki Committee for Human Rights (Serbia) and the Centre for Nonviolent Action (operating from Belgrade, Serbia and Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina).

The meeting started with a three-day **study visit to Herzegovina**, an area in South Bosnia not far from the Adriatic coast. Most of the time was spent in Mostar, a multicultural city that went through a painful and violent confrontation during the war in 1992-1995 and its aftermath. Ethnopolitical conflicts that contributed to the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the complex dynamics and the consequences of war can be studied in microcosm here. Much of the city's infrastructure and ancient buildings were destroyed during the war and have been reconstructed since then with international support. Visits to contested war memorials, monuments and sites of war operations and atrocities contrasted sharply with the picturesque flair of this medieval city. Filled with inspiring reflections and discussions, the visit was enriched by talks with local peace activists and citizens who engage for reconciliation in a situation that is marked by ongoing tensions and competition around interpretations of the past. Later on, the group met for a **five-day workshop in Sarajevo**, the capital of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Like Mostar, Sarajevo had always been a place where people from different religious and cultural backgrounds had coexisted and mixed. Both cities are still suffering the effects of large-scale violence during the 1990s and both illustrate the manifold difficulties in struggling with the past. Building a culture of remembrance that pays respect to the victims from different sides and addresses the different layers of history is a constant challenge.

The idea of initiating an exchange between peacebuilding activists from Asia and the Balkans stemmed from previous cooperation between United NGOs Mission Manipur (UNMM), Brot für die Welt and the Centre for Nonviolent Action (CNA). Originally, more participants from additional countries had been invited to join the encounter and several follow up-meetings in various countries had been planned. As a consequence of the Covid pandemic, the project had to be amended and shortened, and even this workshop was postponed several times. However, finally, due to the high motivation of our partners from South Asia and the Western Balkans and thanks to the extraordinary flexibility of the Centre for Nonviolent Action (CNA), the visit and workshop were held in March 2022. It was worthwhile and obviously responded to the peacebuilders' needs. As the CNA team explains in its evaluation: "peacebuilding is hard and complex (...), issues of collective identities and conflicts (...) are present in both regions. Organisations usually do not have enough capacities to cover all complexities. There is never enough support, there is usually no support by the states (...), the work often relies on enthusiasm of individuals, who are thus in high risk of burn-out (...). The need for reflection and empowerment is crucial, but it is often considered as a luxury and is skipped easily. It is hard enough to find support for peacebuilding, it is even harder to find support for reflection to take place. Rare are those who are aware of this."

Spending ten days with other people who are dedicated to achieving progress in peacebuilding and reconciliation, who strive for social change and want to make the world a better place is a

unique opportunity and a source of empowerment. A kind of retreat where participants can take a step back from their daily obligations and troubles, where activists can talk in a protected and safe space and take away plenty of incentives and inspiration, is invaluable. An apt description of such an experience is that it widens horizons. The authors of this introduction are grateful for the wonderful opportunity of being part of it.

Martina Fischer and Edda Kirleis

Berlin, September 2022

As a special service for participants, CNA provided full documentation – 95 pages and a series of high-quality photographs – which can be downloaded from CNA's website: [link](#).

The following report draws on this documentation, offering a shorter version for international readers who did not participate in the exchange but may be interested in learning more about the advantages, opportunities and methods of a multi-regional peacebuilding encounter.

## 2. Different People and Regions, Similar Conflicts

### 2.1. Dimensions of Conflict in South Asia

*By Edda Kirleis*

South Asia must be understood within its colonial and post-colonial historical context. British India was a vast territory bringing thousands of ethnicities and religious practices together under direct or indirect colonial administration, the latter in so-called “excluded areas”, which were mainly inhabited by indigenous communities. As Northern India had previously been under Muslim rule, the colonial administration collaborated with representatives of Hindu communities. Divide and rule practices were implemented throughout the colonial period, with the administration making use of differences and alliances along religious and ethnic lines. Many leaders of the anti-colonial movements in British India tried hard to mend this divide and establish a secular collective platform. However, when Britain finally had to withdraw, the divide was so strong that it profoundly impacted nation-building.

#### *Colonial heritage: Contested Statehood*

The state of Pakistan was founded in two regions, West and East, of independent India, predominantly inhabited by Muslims, on 14.8.1947. Muslim identity served as the key connector between the different parts. Many other regions which were predominantly inhabited or ruled by Muslims, along with many princely states and other territories with different religions and ethnicities, were integrated into the nation-state of India on and after 15.8.1947, sometimes by force. The nation-state of India proceeded from a clearly secular understanding of statehood. However, from the start, this was contested and challenged by a militant right-wing Hindu movement, strongly influenced by fascist ideology and determined to fight for a Hindu Nation. Mahatma Gandhi's killer was a Hindu extremist. Terrible violence followed the partition of British India, with members of the “other” religion or identity – who were now regarded as the “enemy” – deprived of their land; many were killed and injured by mobs as they attempted to flee their homes. The wounds of partition have not yet healed. After decades of discrimination and neglect of East Pakistan by West Pakistan, protests turned violent and were countered by a

brutal intervention, referred to a genocide, by the Pakistani military. With support from India, Bangladesh emerged as an independent nation-state based on its Bengali identity and language.

### *Violation of indigenous peoples' rights*

Another fault line of nation-building was the inclusion of indigenous peoples and their territories, who had often enjoyed self-administration to varying degrees under British rule or opted for independence rather than accession to India or Pakistan in 1947. In many indigenous areas, accession was forced and instead of winning these communities over by strengthening their rights, participation and wellbeing, they were excluded and totally marginalised. As a consequence, there have been armed conflicts in indigenous territories from the 1950s until today, particularly in the upland regions of the Eastern Himalayas, where several participants in this encounter programme come from. Indigenous communities in the Eastern Himalayas live in areas which include India, Bangladesh (former East Pakistan) and Myanmar and are often divided between these nation-states. At the same time, they are close to India's contested border with China, while many share a border with Myanmar, meaning that they live in militarily sensitive borderlands. Being deprived of their basic rights, several indigenous militant groups have formed. They have fought for self-determination, be it secession or autonomy status, against the state's armed forces from the 1960s onwards. As part of counterinsurgency measures, divide and rule practices turned different local armed groups against each other. Conflicts in Northeast India and in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh share this long history of failed nation-building. Today, they find themselves in protracted conflicts, which have developed an economy of violence built on illegal trading of arms, drugs, timber and even organs and people along well-established illegal routes, some of them linked to the "Golden Triangle". Too many actors from different communities benefit from this economy. This makes working for peace and conflict transformation and establishing an economy of peace an uphill struggle. The power of the security forces overrules the civil administration in diverse ways in various regions. Impunity for crimes committed by security forces is widespread. Patriarchal structures and practices in most indigenous communities restrict women's access to decision-making and makes them more vulnerable to violence within the community and at the hands of external actors. Indigenous women play an important role in building peace in their regions and are often underestimated and excluded from formal peace negotiations. Both Northeast India and the Chittagong Hill Tracts in Bangladesh have seen formal peace negotiations which either failed to reach completion or, if completed, were inadequately implemented.

### *Increasing power of religious extremists*

Hindu extremists have gained considerable power under the current populist government in *India*, which has strong support from India's corporates. Their practice of spreading hate against the "other" is effectively mobilising the very poor and marginalised people who have been deprived of their rights, whose frustration finds a target and an outlet in attacking minorities. Muslims in India are extremely affected, but members of lower castes, particularly Dalits, and women from these communities even more so. The history of caste-based discrimination and patriarchy is thousands of years old and deeply embedded in South Asia's culture and a crucial source of conflict and violence. Caste and patriarchy transcend religious communities and can be found deeply entrenched in each of them. Entire communities are considered impure, untouchable, outcast. Indigenous communities are often approached with similar prejudice<sup>1</sup>. Violence against women saw a sharp rise during the Covid-19 crisis and seems not to have subsided afterwards. In *Bangladesh*, the government is making increasing concessions to Muslim hardliners<sup>2</sup>. Members of minority communities are increasingly attacked, with social media spreading fake news in order to fuel hate and violence throughout the country, as happened during Hindu festivities in 2021.

### *Structural violence and extreme poverty*

Structural violence<sup>3</sup> is widespread throughout South Asia, which is still a region with poverty figures similar to those of sub-Saharan Africa, particularly when it comes to nutrition. With increasing investment, there is a widening gap between rich, poor and people living in extreme poverty. In the "World Inequality Report 2022" (quoted by Frontline Magazine), India is described as a country where "the top 1 per cent of the population holds more than one-fifth or 22 per cent of the total national income in 2021, while the bottom half's share has gone down to just 13 per cent (...) the top 10 per cent earns more than 20 times (...)"<sup>4</sup>. The Indian report for the Multidimensional Poverty Index 2021 mentions that half of India's indigenous communities (Scheduled Tribes) live in multidimensional poverty<sup>5</sup>. Bangladesh is also struggling with a widening gap between rich and poor as a result of rapid and ruthless industrialisation

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1 <https://idsn.org/caste-discrimination>, accessed on 9.8.2022

2 Lorch, Jasmin (2019). *Islamization by Secular Ruling Parties: The Case of Bangladesh*. *Politics and Religion*, 12(2), 257-282.

3 This concept was introduced by the Norwegian sociologist and peace researcher Johan Galtung, in his article "*Violence, Peace, and Peace Research*", *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (1969), pp. 167-191. Structural violence includes institutionalized forms of violence such as racism and sexism and is interdependent with direct violence, domestic violence, gender based violence, hate crimes, racial violence, police violence and state driven violence, terrorism and war. Furthermore it is closely linked to social injustice that affects people in different manners in a variety of social contexts; link accessed on 5.10.2022

4 "*Multidimensional Poverty Index: A new poverty marker*", Frontline, India's National Magazine, December 31, 2021, accessed on 8.8.2022

5 *India. National Multidimensional Poverty Index*, NITI Aayog, 2021, accessed on 8.8.2022

at the expense of the poor and the environment<sup>6</sup>. The government of Bangladesh does not yet provide any disaggregated data that would allow access to poverty figures for indigenous communities, as the government denies their existence as such. However, it is understood that indigenous peoples pay a high price for infrastructure development, losing their ancestral land and therefore their livelihoods.

Further reading:

Sudeep Chakravarti: *Highway 39: Journeys Through A Fractured Land*, New Delhi 2012

Sudeep Chakravarti: *The Eastern Gate: War and Peace in Nagaland, Manipur and India's Far East*, New Delhi 2022

Bertil Lintner: *Great Game East: India, China and the Struggle for Asia's Most Volatile Frontier*, New Delhi 2012

Shapan Adnan and Ranajit Dastidar: [Alienation of the Lands of Indigenous Peoples in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh](#), Dhaka 2011; accessed on 9.8.2022.

## 2.2. The Legacies of Violent Conflict in the Western Balkans

*By Martina Fischer*

The history of the Western Balkans differs from the colonial past of South Asia; however, the region has also gone through periods of “divide and rule”, oppression and intervention by major powers under the Ottoman Empire, during the Habsburg period, and finally the Second World War and occupation by the Nazi regime in the 20th century. Societies in this region are familiar with a high level of violence, shifts of borders and population transfers. In the European power game, the empires in the 19th century succeeded in securing their claims to power in the Balkans for a time, but neither the Habsburgs nor the Ottomans were able to establish a national consciousness that transcended the numerous forms of ethno-political nationalism; nor were they successful in engendering a sense of loyalty to the central state. Ultimately, both these empires fragmented into a plethora of smaller states, each dominated by one nation<sup>7</sup>. A similar development occurred in the 20th century with the founding of the Socialist Federal Republic

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<sup>6</sup> Briefing note for countries on the 2022 Multidimensional Poverty Index, Bangladesh, accessed on 9.8.2022

<sup>7</sup> See Markus Reinkowski, [Das Osmanische Reich – Ein antikoloniales Imperium?](#) In *Zeithistorische Forschungen* 1/2006, p. 34-54; accessed 5.10.2022.

of Yugoslavia, which was based on the concept of brotherhood and unity and extended from Slovenia in the north through Croatia, Serbia/Kosovo, Bosnia and Montenegro to Macedonia in the south. Most of the states that emerged in the Western Balkans consist of multiethnic or multicultural and multireligious societies, and some of them face ongoing struggles in which political representation, ethnopolitical divides and movements for self-determination or even secession play a role. The dissolution of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in the 1990s was marked by the rise of ethnonationalism, various wars and numerous atrocities. In particular, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), Croatia and Serbia look back to a common history of confrontation and violent struggles over power, property and territory. When Croatia proclaimed its sovereignty in 1991, a war began between the Croatian forces and the army of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY). One year later, BiH's proclamation of sovereignty was followed by more than three years of war, mass killings and systematic ethnic persecution. The wars ended in 1995 when the Dayton Peace Accords (DPA) were negotiated between the conflicting parties by international brokers, in parallel to NATO air strikes. Due to the establishment of an international mechanism for the prosecution of war crimes, transitional justice processes started quite early in the Western Balkans compared with many other war-torn societies. The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), created by the United Nations in 1993, had a leading role in this process. By signing the DPA, the governments of BiH, Croatia and the FRY committed to mutual recognition and the peaceful settlement of disputes. They also agreed to adhere to the provisions on dealing with the consequences of the war, notably the return of refugees and the prosecution of war crimes. In particular, the agreement obliged the governments to cooperate with the ICTY. International actors have put a great deal of emphasis on legal accountability in the Western Balkans, in particular the prosecution of war crimes and fact-finding, with finding missing persons a clear priority. They have also put some pressure on the governments in the region to fulfil the obligations mentioned in the DPA. The cooperation with the ICTY was one of the main criteria set by the European Union (EU) for accession negotiations with the governments in the region. International actors – in particular the ICTY, and also the EU and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) – assisted the governments in the region to establish domestic war crimes chambers and transitional justice strategies, which are expected to serve both accountability and fact-finding.

#### *Ethnonationalism and contested statehood as an obstacle for peacebuilding*

All these efforts were important and helpful to end impunity, to give a voice to the victims and to provide documentation and historical archives. However, they were of limited effect for peacebuilding. More than 25 years after the Dayton Peace Accords ended the war in Bosnia, the states that signed the agreement continue to struggle with the legacies of the violent past. Furthermore, they are also struggling with borders and political structures at present. This is particularly true of Bosnia-Herzegovina, where ethnopolitical division is noticeable in the construction of different languages, cultures and religious identities, and where relevant parts of society do not identify with the (nation-)state of BiH. Ethnonationalist thinking and political

action also hinder processes of reconciliation and relationship-building in the neighbouring countries. Serbia and Kosovo have to cope with a violent past and the legacies of the war in 1999 (which was further complicated by NATO's intervention). Political actors and society in Serbia are still struggling with the status and independence of Kosovo. Furthermore, in North Macedonia, tension continues between those who define themselves as ethnic Slavic Macedonians and Albanians, which came close to escalating into another war in 2001.

*“Dealing with the past” as a need and challenge – and a source of conflict*

There is a need to complete the search for the missing and to investigate crimes and human rights violations related to the wars of the 1990s. As the mandate of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) is running out, much work still needs to be done by the courts and prosecutors, state institutions and civil society organisations (CSOs) in these countries. Experience from the Western Balkans shows that progress towards justice and truth recovery benefits from close cooperation with civil society actors and local communities. Furthermore, retributive approaches need to be complemented by restorative approaches from the start, in order to pave the way for a long-term process of reconciliation and peacebuilding. Coming to terms with the past is a challenge for societies emerging from violent conflict in the region. As different stakeholders have opposing interpretations of history, addressing the past always harbours a risk of deepening divides. However, not facing the past and leaving crimes and human rights violations unaccounted for would obstruct efforts to envision a common future. No blueprints can be transferred from one region to another, as strategies for dealing with the past and peacebuilding have to consider the cultural specifics of the society in question. Nevertheless, experiences from the Western Balkans may inspire scholars and practitioners in other parts of the world – and vice versa. Bosnia-Herzegovina is an excellent place to enhance an encounter and debates on the question how courageous individuals and civil society groups can advance dealing with the past, relationship-building and reconciliation in a situation where state structures continue to be contested and identity is constructed in ethnonationalist categories. Some might argue that Bosnia is in a state of frozen war and cold peace rather than an example of successful conflict transformation. However, the situation is stable enough for grassroots activities to grow. According to their experience, initiatives for dealing with the past always risk raising new conflicts, and inclusive cultures of remembrance are facing numerous obstacles. But at the same time they can pave the way for processes and healing and they are definitely a precondition for reconciliation.

*Bosnia-Herzegovina as a place for studying a situation of frozen conflict*

During the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s, Bosnia-Herzegovina experienced one of the most brutal wars in the region. After the signing of the Dayton Peace Accords in 1995 by the governments of Bosnia, Croatia and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (comprising Serbia and Montenegro), the weapons fell silent but a genuine peace process has not developed to this

day. A complex federal system has been installed in Bosnia-Herzegovina, which was intended to ensure that each of the constituent peoples was represented. However, this cemented polarisation for the long term. Even now, the country is still deeply divided as a result of power struggles between rival ethnopolitical parties. Due to the dysfunctional political system, poor economic prospects and high unemployment, many people, especially the young, choose to emigrate. The social and political process of dealing with the past faces tight constraints and is a source of considerable conflict potential. Nonetheless, a constructive approach must be sought as a matter of urgency and is a precondition for reconciliation and the establishment of inter-community relations.

The 1995 Dayton Agreement ensured Bosnia's continued existence as an undivided sovereign state within internationally recognised borders. Bosnia and Herzegovina – as the country would henceforth be known – consists of two entities: Republika Srpska (RS) (49% of the territory), mainly inhabited by Bosnian Serbs, and the Bosniak-Croat Federation (51% of the territory). According to the Dayton Peace Agreement, Bosnia and Herzegovina consists of three "constituent peoples", or "nations": Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs. At state level, the country has a bicameral parliament, a three-member presidency (to ensure that each of the constituent peoples is represented), a Council of Ministers, a constitutional court and a central bank. The state's institutions have few powers, however; their responsibilities include foreign and trade policy, customs and monetary policy, immigration, control of aviation and, since 2005, military and defence policy. All other powers lie with the entities.

#### *Achievements and challenges created by the Dayton Accords<sup>8</sup>*

The Dayton Agreement required Bosnia and Herzegovina to introduce a market economy, privatise state-owned companies and comply with the stipulations made by the international financial institutions. A High Representative of the International Community took over the task of overseeing compliance with the provisions of the agreement; Bosnia is therefore (even now) a protectorate under the control of the internationally constituted Peace Implementation Council. A NATO-led protection force (initially IFOR, later SFOR) and then EUFOR, provided by EU member states, supported the country's post-war consolidation, flanked by development policy measures and humanitarian assistance. The Dayton Agreement granted refugees and displaced persons the right to return to their places of residence and cleared the way for democratic elections. Under international supervision, the conflict parties' armed forces were dissolved and the soldiers integrated into a joint army. Support was also provided for the investigation and prosecution of war crimes<sup>9</sup>. The ICTY in The Hague indicted 161 persons and handed down 84 guilty verdicts. The national tribunals initiated by the ICTY still have several thousand of open cases to deal with. More than a quarter of a century after the signing of the Dayton Peace Accords, however, the

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8 Martina Fischer, *Kriege und Konflikte: Bosnien-Herzegowina*, BpB 12.11.2020; accessed on 5.10.2022.

9 Martina Fischer, *Transitional Justice: Lessons from the Western Balkans*, Policy Brief No 5, Berghof Foundation 29.2.2016, accessed on 5.10.2022

war in Bosnia is still a highly contested issue among the various political camps. In particular, there is frequent controversy over the events at Srebrenica, where more than 8,000 Bosniak men and boys were killed by Bosnia Serb militias between 11 and 19 July 1995 (paramilitary groups from FR Yugoslavia/Serbia were also involved). International courts have concluded that what happened at Srebrenica was genocide – a view which is not accepted by many Bosnian Serb and Serbian politicians.

The reconstruction assistance provided by the international community, amounting to around USD 14 billion, helped to repair the damage inflicted during the war; however, an estimated USD 1 billion was misappropriated. UN and EU police missions supported the modernisation of the security forces but could do little to curb the activities of illegal networks (e.g. drug and human trafficking). Economic development continues to be impeded by inefficiency in state-owned enterprises, corruption, bureaucratic obstacles and a large informal sector. Very little foreign direct investment flows into the country. The substantial current account deficit is eased only very slightly by remittances from the Bosnian diaspora. Even now, the state administration is the main employer, funded solely by permanent debt. The economic consequences of the coronavirus pandemic are also worrying. The lack of prospects for the younger generations is a significant problem. In 2019, the unemployment rate stood at 16%; however, youth unemployment was estimated to be twice this figure.

The ongoing polarisation and the fact that many voters continue to support ethnonationalist parties at elections are major obstacles to the country's development. The Dayton Constitution was able to end the armed conflict. However, it was not entirely helpful in terms of peacebuilding and conflict transformation, as it fostered a political system that maintained ethnopolitical confrontation and divisions. Moreover, it created a problem as those who do not match or accept these ethnopolitical categories (Croats, Serbs and Bosniaks) are excluded from active participation in political power. This issue has been highlighted by the European Court of Human Rights and is another reason why Bosnia needs to change its constitution in order to be accepted as a candidate for EU accession negotiations.

#### *Dysfunctional state structures, discontent and emigration of young people*

The EU and various international institutions had expected that the Dayton Agreement, development grants and European investment would allow change to happen. However, structural dysfunctionality and a high level of corruption are ongoing and the system has “kept in place political leaders and factions whose grip on power is based on the ability to mobilize supporters through clientelist bargains and demands for ethnic solidarity. (...) These politically and economically dysfunctional systems, compounded by the Dayton Agreement's structural traps, have blocked any chances Bosnia has to join the EU. Simply put, no one in any of the EU institutions is willing to provide an accession pathway to a Bosnian political system so mired in ethnic clientelism that it requires regular interventions by the OHR.” (Alexander Clarkson, World Policy Report 10.8.2022). Political blockades and corruption have demographic and economic consequences for Bosnia, which experienced a population decline from 3.9 million in 1996 to

less than 3.3 million this year. As a consequence, society is aging, which makes Bosnia even less attractive to investors. “With their disastrous record of economic mismanagement and venal incompetence, the country’s Serbian, Croat and Bosniak political elites have discouraged economic investment that could generate prosperity for Bosnians from every community. A lack of well-paying jobs has fueled an outflow of Bosnians of working age into more prosperous EU states where ample employment opportunities can be found. These political legacies of the Bosnian civil war have compounded wartime population loss by fueling a continued departure of thousands of Bosnia’s most motivated young people each year since the late 1990s.” (Alexander Clarkson, World Policy Report 10.8.2022). Protests and riots in 2014 have shown that there is vast potential unease and disappointment among young people from different communities who no longer want to be trapped in such a system. This is why Alexander Clarkson concludes: “It is time for the EU to acknowledge that Bosnia’s constitution and the OHR oversight that holds it together is one of the primary causes of the country’s dysfunction, rather than a means through which to solve it. If the EU does not help Bosnians who want to build a better future for their country, it will face a crisis around new ideological fault lines for which it will have to share the blame.”

## **2.3. The War in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Its Consequences**

*By Nedžad Novalić*

Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) is a country with a population of less than 3.3 million people, bordering Croatia, Serbia and Montenegro. After medieval power struggles and constant threats from various opposing kingdoms and empires, the country was part of the Ottoman Empire for four centuries. In the last 100 years it went through major political shifts, starting with annexation by Austria-Hungary. After WWI, it became part of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, and after WWII, it became a republic within the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Following the dissolution of the SFRY and BiH’s declaration of independence in March 1992, the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina started and lasted until 1995.

The war was an armed conflict between the Bosnian Serbs (mostly Orthodox Christians), Bosnian Croats (mostly Catholic) and Bosniaks (mostly Muslim). These three communities that inhabited the territory of this former Yugoslav Republic got in ethnopolitical confrontation. Although religion has divided these communities for centuries, Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs speak almost the same language, have the same Slavic origin, and shared history. As a prelude to the war, and especially because of the war, there is an insistence on the differences between these communities, which today are perceived as completely separate ethnic and ethnopolitical communities.

The main conflict parties were the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Army of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina (ARBiH), largely composed of Bosniaks) and the Bosnian Serb and Bosnian Croat entities within Bosnia and Herzegovina and their armed forces: the Republic of Srpska (Army of RS – VRS) and Herzeg-Bosna (Croatian Defence Council – HVO). While the HVO was supported by neighbouring Croatia and its Croatian Army (HV), the Army of Republika Srpska (VRS) was supported by Serbia and the Yugoslav People's Army (JNA) which, until the outbreak of conflicts in Yugoslavia, functioned as "the common armed force of all peoples and minorities of Yugoslavia and of all working people and citizens". The VRS retained the command structure and manpower of the JNA and took possession of its weaponry, which gave the newly established army of Bosnian Serbs a head start over all other armed formations in BH.

*The numbers of killed and missing persons are still a subject of controversy*

The war lasted three and a half years and was accompanied by war crimes and mass killings, torture and disappearances as a result of military operations and ethnic cleansing. Human rights violations and crimes against humanity were often committed against civilians. Over 100,000 people lost their lives. Of this number, approximately 31,500 were missing. Despite the administrative constraints of a complex government structure and the systematic efforts of certain parties to prevent the finding and identification of bodies, about 75% of those reported missing as a result of the war have been found. The war was brought to an end after the signing of the General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina in Paris in December 1995. Peace negotiations were held and the Agreement finalised in Dayton, Ohio, in November 1995. Known as the Dayton Peace Agreement, it was signed by the presidents of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. The numbers of killed and missing persons and their ethnicity are still the subject of controversy and dispute among the former warring sides. The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), established by the UN Security Council in May 1993, has contributed to the historical record, but efforts are still being made to combat the denial of committed atrocities, and there is controversy over their scale and magnitude throughout ex-Yugoslavia. Some of the most important verdicts handed down by the Tribunal are those relating to genocide in the Eastern Bosnian town of Srebrenica, where more than 8,000 men and boys were killed in 1995. Furthermore, as a consequence (probably also as a goal) of the war, large population shifts have occurred: most people have grouped in areas where their ethnic group is in the majority.

*Divides along ethnopolitical (cultural and religious) lines*

The consequences of the war are, almost 30 years later, still very visible and present in everyday life, in ethnically divided cities and education systems (with separate schools and different curricula for students from a Bosniak, Bosnian Serb or Bosnian Croat background, or separate classes in multiethnic schools). Today, as a consequence of the war, three official languages exist: Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian. Semantically, there is almost no difference

between them; all local people in Bosnia can understand one another without difficulty. But language (as much as religion) plays an important role in creating so-called “national identities” and is therefore developed further as a vehicle of division. There are three major religions in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Islam, Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism. There is still a lack of communication across “ethnic” (or, rather, cultural and religious) lines. Hatred that is based on ethnonationalist thinking persists, fuelling tensions and violence.

Further reading (links accessed on 5.10.2022)

ICG, [Bosnia and Herzegovina: Deterring Disintegration](#), 27 Jan. 2022

ICG, [Grappling with Bosnia’s Dual Crises](#), 9 Nov. 2021

BBC News, [Bosnia shivers as ghost of nationalism returns](#), 9 Feb. 2022

Radio Free Europe, [Bosnia On The Brink Again: Is 2022 Going To Be The Year Everything Falls Apart?](#), 16 Dec. 2021

# 3. Study Tour to Herzegovina: Impressions from Jablanica and Mostar

*By CNA*

The encounter for peace activists from Asia and the Western Balkans started with a study tour to the southern part of Bosnia close to the Adriatic coast, known as Herzegovina. The trip included a visit to the Museum of the Battle for the Wounded at Neretva River in Jablanica (a memorial site that was established after World War II), to the partisan cemetery and famous buildings in Mostar, and to Tekija, a religious site dating back to Ottoman times in Blagaj. The group also met local peace and human rights activists, journalists, representatives of religious communities and former camp prisoners. Participants got to know each other and became familiar with the history and dimensions of conflicts in the host country. They visited places of suffering and memorials from different wars and periods of history and became aware that all of these are contested. They listened to testimonies of individuals who experienced the most recent war and are trying to cope with its consequences. The programme illustrated the extent to which reality in Bosnia is burdened by the experience of violence and showed that there are various layers of memories, not only linked to the war that ended in 1995, but also connected to the previous wars in the 20th century. Participants realised how facts are contested (or silenced) and learned that different interpretations of history are used for political purposes by different sides. And controversial interpretations of past events are also used to legitimise new acts of discrimination or exclusion, fuelling a continuity of mistrust, fear and violence in the name of so-called “national identity”.







### 3.1. Visiting Memorials related to World War II

#### *The Museum of the Battle for the Wounded at Neretva in Jablanica*

On 26 March, the group visited the Memorial Complex in Jablanica on the banks of the Neretva river. It was established in 1978 to mark the 35th anniversary of the Battle of the Neretva during the Second World War. The “Battle for the Wounded” was a consequence of a German strategic plan for a joint attack by the Axis Powers against partisans in 1943, aimed at partisan-held areas in Western Bosnia and parts of central Croatia. By the end of March 1943, when around 8,000 partisans were killed and 2,000 captured, the partisans decided to withdraw to south-eastern BiH and managed to evacuate around 4,000 wounded persons. The most important exhibit at the Memorial Complex is the destroyed bridge over the Neretva. One of the most famous Yugoslav movies that illustrates the Battle of Neretva was released in 1969, with film posters by Pablo Picasso. During the most recent war, from April 1993 to March 1994, the Museum in Jablanica served as a detention facility under the authority of the Army of BiH (ARBiH). Many crimes, including abuses, sexual violence and murders, were committed against civilians and soldiers of Croat nationality. On 16 October 2007, the ICTY sentenced Nihad Bojadžić to one year in prison for crimes he had committed against prisoners of war in the Jablanica area in the second half of 1993. The Appeals Chamber upheld the Trial Chamber’s acquittal of Sefer Halilović, a former ARBiH commander. The museum is now a National Monument of Bosnia-Herzegovina, but it makes no reference to the crimes committed at this site during the 1992-1995 war.

#### *The Partisan Cemetery in Mostar*

The Partisan Cemetery in Mostar was built in the 1960s as a place of remembrance for people who fought and were killed during the Second World War, and it is full of architectural symbolism, mirroring the city of Mostar. The cemetery was combined with a monument built in memory of fallen partisans, anti-fascists and members of all ethnic groups in the city of Mostar and Bosnia-Herzegovina, and in honour of all those who opposed fascism in WWII. It is a National Monument of Bosnia-Herzegovina, built by the well-known architect Bogdan Bogdanović and inaugurated on 25 September 1965 by Josip Broz Tito. It was funded by the Municipal Assembly with numerous donations from Mostar’s labour organisations. Trees were planted by youth volunteers in the area around the monument. Stone slabs and stone from destroyed houses in the old town were used to build the monument. The shape of the tombstones marking the fallen fighters is reminiscent of felled trees, a symbol of broken youth. After years of neglect, vandalism and decay, the renovation of the Partisan Cemetery began in 2008. However, the monument has been vandalised on every possible occasion since then. We had the opportunity to see it

in relatively good condition. A few months after our visit, it was reported that the cemetery has been attacked and badly damaged by extremists. Almost all the memorial plaques were destroyed.<sup>10</sup>

## **3.2. Mostar during the 1992-1995 War**

In 1991, the municipality of Mostar had 126,067 inhabitants, and the city itself 83,686. In the city. Bosniaks made up 34%, Croats 29%, Serbs 19% and Yugoslavs 15% of the population. At the start of the war in BiH, from April to June 1992, the Army of the Republic of BiH (Army of BiH) and the Croatian Defence Council (HVO) defended the city from attacks by the Yugoslav People's Army (JNA). The Serb side never really tried to cross the Neretva; the plan was to occupy the eastern part of Mostar. After the failure of the offensive, the JNA withdrew in June 1992. After the withdrawal of the JNA, relations between the HVO and Army of BiH began to deteriorate. The second phase of war followed in May 1993, when the HVO began a siege of the eastern part of the city to declare Mostar the new capital of the short-lived Croat quasi-national entity – the Republic of Herceg-Bosna (HRHB). The siege lasted for almost nine months and resulted in the destruction of much of the city, including the Old Bridge on 9 November 1993. About 30,000 Bosniaks were expelled from the western part of the city, which was now under HVO control. The humanitarian situation in the eastern part of the city (under the control of the Army of BiH) was extremely bad, with no drinking water, food or electricity. An estimated 2,000 Bosniak civilians from the western part of the city were taken to the HVO-controlled Heliodrom camp. The destruction of the city attracted the attention of the world media, which led to condemnation of the Croat side. The siege of the city was lifted in early 1994. The Croat-Bosniak conflict was ended with the signing of the Washington Agreement, which also abolished the HRHB.

Mostar suffered major destruction during the war. In the past decades, many of the ancient buildings – including the famous bridge – have been restored with support from international organisations. However, reconstruction of broken relationships is proving much more difficult. Mostar is often considered to be a “problem city” as domestic politicians have been unable to agree on the administrative arrangements. The High Representative of the International Community in BiH, Paddy Ashdown, issued a decision enacting the Statute of Mostar, which since 2004 has defined Mostar as a single city unit and established the city areas that represent the different constituencies in the City of Mostar. However, the election of the city councillors in this way was declared unconstitutional at the request of the Croat representatives in the House of Peoples of the Parliamentary Assembly. The Constitutional Court ruling was not enforced,

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10 This was reported by N1info Sarajevo on 15 June 2022; see [“All 700 commemorative plaques at Partisan Memorial Cemetery in Mostar destroyed”](#), accessed on 5.10.2022.



and the city was blocked for 12 years, with no possibility of holding city council elections. Irma Baralija, a young politician from Mostar, sued BiH at the European Court of Human Rights, saying she was denied the right to vote due to the failure to hold local elections. She won the lawsuit, and after 12 years, the first local elections were held in Mostar in 2020. The largest number of mandates in the city council in the local elections was won by the coalition led by the HDZBiH (Croatian Democratic Union, major Croat national party) which got 13 mandates. SDA (Party of Democratic Action - major Bosniak national party) has won 11, and the coalition of civic parties (Naša stranka, SDP) holds 6 mandates; one parliamentary mandate will be held by the Serbian List. Finally the local government was formed by the HDZ-SDA coalition, that had been in power for more than 15 years in the post-war period.

### **3.3. Voices from Mostar: Talks with Peace Activists, Journalists and Ex-Prisoners of War**

The group had an opportunity to learn about war legacies and conflicts in Mostar and Bosnia-Herzegovina through talks with local peace and human rights activists, journalists and representatives of religious communities. On 27 March, we met with Štefica Galić, a journalist from Mostar who writes media reports on war crimes and has been campaigning for justice and against discrimination for decades, and with Azem Feriz, a representative of the Islamic community. On 28 March, we talked to Stanislav Krezić and Emir Hajdarović. Both survived the Mostar camps on two different sides during the war. They are now working to support the surviving camp inmates and to preserve the memory of those who died. They are the ones who took a brave first step and went to the places of suffering on both sides together. Below, we include some of the relevant statements. For a full report on the discussions, see CNA's Full Scale Documentation.

#### *Talk with Štefica Galić and Azem Feriz*

*Question (Nedžad Novalić): Štefica, during your fight for human rights and justice you payed a high personal price. Was it worth?*

*Štefica:* I think my engagement was worthwhile. But I am also angry (...) and terrified at the lies and injustice. I had to leave my home, people were spitting at me. (...) I have lost some of my friends and part of my family. But I was not able to keep silent because I watched my neighbours (Bosniaks) being loaded into trucks and driven to the Heliodrom camp. Today, many people thank me; I received some awards in Germany, for example. But I was not given any official awards by anyone in Bosnia and Herzegovina. We have published 21 books that deal with the truth about the past, we hold a school of critical thinking for young people, and every year we have around

15 students attending it. When I started to write about crimes committed by the Army of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, there were some negative reactions. But I think it is a crime to forget a crime. We should condemn our war criminals. Here, all three sides celebrate their criminals as heroes, and it is quite hard to deal with that. A nation cannot be criminal; criminals have names and surnames.

*Azem (was asked to talk about the cooperation between religious leaders):* It is improving. Still, a lot of time has passed. I think there is cooperation. I can understand that it goes slowly, but it is improving. There is a joint iftar. The Orthodox church also organised something.

*Štefica:* What we have between religious communities is a formal thing. But what is going on between people? There is an abuse of symbols – church tower, cross and so on. On every little hill you will see a cross, as if the Roman legions passed through yesterday. There is a Cemetery of Peace, and there are names of collaborators, Ustashas<sup>11</sup> who committed crimes during World War II and who killed so many young people. The construction of this cemetery was supported by the EU.

*Question: What needs to be done in order to improve people's lives and the relationships between communities, and who should do it?*

*Štefica:* We could contribute to change in elections. The political elites fill the public space with a rhetoric of fear, which serves their own interests. We need new, younger authorities. I think that elections are important for new young forces to appear, non-nationalistic forces. Here, we have political parties of leftist orientation, but unfortunately, they only respond to nationalistic statements.

*Azem:* The situation is a complex one, really, politics, the surroundings of Croatia and Serbia ... Many people, much more educated and informed than myself, constantly speak on these topics and how the situation can be improved. It is ungrateful to give any response to that and say what should be repaired and improved.

*Štefica:* For me, everything is clear and simple. There was aggression against Bosnia and Herzegovina by Serbia and Croatia, and today aggression is ongoing in the diplomatic sphere. Ordinary people are not in a quarrel, politics are contested, and they transfer all that onto people, and people are living in fear. We are wasting time on unconstructive things. I do not want to be a privileged Croat, I want everyone to have equal rights. (...) Today we have very few mixed marriages. My kids did not attend religious classes, and it was marked as unjustified absence. Religious classes cannot be compulsory. (...) In our education system, these children only learn how to be separate. The young people who attend the school of critical thinking are already different. When young people have some curiosity still, there is hope. Young people have to get educated.

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11 The „Ustasha“ was founded in 1930 in the Kingdom of Italy as a secret and ultra-nationalist Croat organization that transformed into a fascist movement. Its members committed numerous war crimes and murdered Serbs, Jews and Roma as well as political dissidents in the region of former Yugoslavia during World War II.

*Question: What would you like people from different parts of the world to take away with them from Mostar? What would you like them to learn from the Mostar experience?*

*Štefica:* It is important to take care of your civic states, so that power is not taken over by right-wing forces. Keep on living together with other citizens, as we lived together. Yugoslavia was dreamed of and created by the best and destroyed by the worst.

*Azem:* Mostar is a beautiful city, despite all its problems and history. I am glad that you visited Mostar and I hope you like it.

*Talk with Stanislav Krezić<sup>12</sup> and Emir Hajdarović:*

*Question (Nedžad Novalić): What has your path looked like from the moment you were released from detention in the camp until today?*

*Emir:* Stana and myself, we understand each other very well. People over here need peace, and a kind of stability after the events of 1992-95. I was imprisoned in the first year of the war at the age of 21 and spent 309 days in a camp run by the HVO (Croatian Defence Council). I can feel the consequences even today. I have been involved in the work of the association of camp prisoners for some years. We are alive 30 years after the war and the war lives in us still. I would like my children to live here and not experience what I went through. The main impulse is to stop being afraid of another war. (...) But individuals who speak about coexistence and peace are not popular; they are not accepted by politicians, nor by their communities. We do not have to love each other, but we can live a normal life and talk to achieve understanding, because we have all gone through suffering.

*Stanislav:* As you can see, we speak the same language and we do not need a translator. When things were really bad, we needed a translator, and it was disastrous for all of us. I spent 156 days in a concentration camp. I have experienced a lot, I witnessed many things, I was tortured. When I was released I wanted revenge. I was insulting all non-Croats, thinking that only my people suffered like this. I was a different man then and I am not happy about that, but I am proud that I can talk about it today. Once my daughter asked me if she was allowed to invite her friend, a Muslim, to come to our home. She was afraid that I might get angry. In this moment I realised that I had to make some changes. Through listening to other stories I began to empathise with them. I realised that this was the way to a better tomorrow. In such a situation, these associations help a lot, as well as psychologists. I know that I cannot change a lot, but I can change myself. I am deeply convinced that justice must win. My family was supporting me, and happy about my transformation. In regard to my environment, there it could be seen who a real friend was. Some of them asked: "What has happened to you?" and were critical of what I do. But I received a lot, I am declared a hero of peace by peacebuilders.

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<sup>12</sup> Stanislav Krezić was an important partner for CNA. Unfortunately he died several months after this event, on 15 November 2022 after a long period of disease. Our thoughts are with his loved ones and family.

*Emir:* All three communities had certain traumas from this war. And we try to show people how ruinous that is. Many people suffered much more than myself, from all three communities. War begins and ends at the table, but what stays after the war is our honour. Education does not work towards peace and reconciliation. (This remark refers to the fact that schooling takes place in separate classes, divided along ethnopolitical lines, in one building. This model is called “two schools under one roof”.)

*Stanislav:* Mostar has lost a lot of its population, and many people have left. My brother married a Bosniak woman, and they moved to the USA. Vukovar and Mostar were the most mixed cities before the war. Today, Mostar is stagnating because we have the same people in power as we had during the war. I am a returnee and I live among Bosniaks. If ordinary people were in charge, that would be solved quickly.

#### Final comments by the group:

- It was amazing when Stefica Galić presented her work and explained what happened during and after the war. How can we continue to address peace and justice when family members are attacked? How are we going to monitor that? How can we build the capacity of civil society?

- This visit was very special; listening to people who were in the war on different sides, and listening to their ideas about change was inspiring. That sense of helplessness is a dominant feeling among peace activists. There are people around who are facing the same or similar difficulties, but also share the same convictions.

- I see lots of opportunities. In my country we do not even have two schools under the same roof.



DIFFERENCES

- CASTE SYSTEM
- COLONIAL EXPERIENCES
- YUGOSLAVIAN - "I"
- \*RACIAL POVERTY
- EUROPEAN UNION
- GENE PAIR / MISINFORMATION
- INTRO -> WITHIN CURRICULUM
- MILITARY INFLUENCE +
- REFERENCE
- WOMEN**
- ETHNIC MINORITIES

# 4. Highlights from the Workshop in Sarajevo

## 4.1. For Swift Readers: Executive Summary

*By Nenad Vukosavljević and Edda Kirleis*

### *About spaces*

The idea for this encounter derived from many years of human rights and peace activism and the feeling that peace work can benefit from learning from different experiences. The idea to bring people from Asia and the Balkans together in a multi-day encounter evolved from the cooperation between the Centre for Nonviolent Action and Bread for the World, and was taken on by various partners. The underlying assumption was that activism in peacebuilding means constant exposure to injustice and work with victims of injustice, which burdens activists and creates a need for retreat and exchange in a safe space. Many of them share the experience that the harm done cannot be repaired and experiences of success are scarce. Even (small) successes are difficult to accept, being surrounded by a sea of injustice. The ability to continue the work in such circumstances can be strengthened or weakened by measures that we as individuals, our organisations and our support groups can take.

The ultimate goal of the whole endeavour was to provide space for reflection and exchange in an honest and cooperative, rather than competitive mode, in the expectation that our insights might be shared and our theories and work practices enhanced.

The exchange format was partially dictated by the circumstances of the pandemic, but the final design, which combined exposure to the local context as a prelude to the workshop, proved to be fruitful. There was a very significant need to create this kind of safe space for exchange, learning and encounter. All participants gave their full attention, hearts and minds to the encounter and greatly appreciated the opportunity for participatory and semi-structured learning.

As the work on peace and justice requires innovative approaches and there are no standard ways of working, learning has to be experience-based and start with the activists themselves. There is always a great degree of creativity and experimentation in such processes. Certainly, one of the key lessons learned from this encounter is that people working for peace and human

rights in a transformative sense need collective spaces in order to recharge, improve their strategies and reflect on their own work and its environment. In this respect, the encounter has been a process of true empowerment.

#### *About Cross-Cultural Exchange*

Furthermore, cross-cultural exchange is of additional value in that it enables us to look at our own context through the eyes of outsiders and allow questions to be asked that are not being asked within that context. However, it is not only about difference – cross-cultural exchange also helps in understanding patterns of conflict which are sometimes similar, despite their different contexts, which may be thousands of miles apart. Patterns of power relations, particularly those shaped through class, patriarchy, identity politics or corruption, just to name a few, were clearly recognised as common ground. And the framework of international funding in the peace and development sector is yet another common denominator and is perceived as very challenging by all peace activists who joined the encounter. The combination of travelling and talking together, informal spaces to get to know each other and build trust, and workshop sessions to deepen the debate, proved very productive, creating shared impressions and sparking fresh ideas.

During the workshop, several sessions focused on different, if not controversial positions on several relevant issues in peace work. The barometer method, where certain positions are debated between the extreme poles of “I agree” and “I disagree”, sparked inspiring and intense debates. However, it was interesting to see that in this group, controversial opinions turned out to be constructive rather than defensive and thus helped to broaden horizons and knowledge. Different dimensions of a certain topic were included to explain why different positions might be taken on the same issue. With almost every issue, be it the role of international war crime tribunals, feminism or institutional challenges, a very rich canvas of perspectives and analyses emerged. The design of the encounter, which included confidence-building, bonding and exposure as well as space and time for self-expression, and a culture of mutual respect enhanced the quality of the discussions. Furthermore, an experienced, sensitive and flexible facilitation team made a difference. And lastly, each of the participants had a wealth of grassroots experience and was willing to share this and learn from other contexts and experiences.

#### *About Women, Gender Perspectives and Feminist Approaches*

Another opinion shared was that coming together as women with a focus on this common identity across ethnic and political divides can at times enable an encounter between communities that is otherwise not possible. A space of respecting each other and listening to each other as women emerges. Women’s leadership needs to be nurtured much more in order to take peace processes forward. There is still much potential that has yet to be tapped. There was a clear agreement that biologically being a woman does not make a person more peaceful as all genders grow up in patriarchal structures and systems, which shape everybody. However,



feminist thinking and practice challenging patriarchy and overcoming divides were considered key to social change and peace, particularly when indigenous feminisms are nurtured in local communities.

#### *About Identity Politics, Minorities and Self-Determination*

Identities are part of human nature, and each person has many different identities by which they are known. Identity politics is about using one particular (collective) identity for political purposes. This can be equally instrumentalised for promoting rights or for promoting hate and violence. South Asia and the Western Balkans are full of examples of the latter. In both contexts, it is often the minority community that is victimised in the process. The same community may be a victimised minority on one side of the border and a dominating majority on the other side, with entirely different experiences and roles despite being the same community, such as Serbs in Croatia and Serbia or Hindus in India and Bangladesh. It was felt that it is crucial to nurture plural identities and strengthen notions of self-determination on this basis rather than based on nationalisms that limit people to one part of their identity only. Patterns of discrimination need to be understood as power relations rather than as ethnic or religious differences.

#### *About Transitional Justice, Peace and Reconciliation*

It was clearly acknowledged that processes of unearthing the truth and providing justice are necessary to deal with the past. International tribunals can play an important role in this, but require a high degree of sensitivity in order not to do harm. From the perspective of practitioners who gathered at this workshop, it was strongly felt that a holistic and systemic approach to peacebuilding is required in order to put international, hybrid or national tribunals into a wider context of necessary and mutually supporting activities. International tribunals cannot replace local processes of reconciliation, restitution and peace, but need to be set up taking their impact on all these levels into account. Often, such institutions are overloaded with too ambitious or unrealistic expectations which cannot be fulfilled and this can cause disappointment. Furthermore, judicial decisions do not necessarily contribute to conflict transformation but can be misused in order to spread hate and increase conflict. Therefore, justice alone is not sufficient for holistic transformation. Healing processes are needed in societies dealing with a violent past in order to pave the way for reconciliation and (re-)building relationships. This requires additional/other activities over a longer period of time, over several generations, and they need to cover many different social and cultural dimensions, not just the political level.

#### *Key Concerns regarding Motivation, Effectiveness and Risks*

Participants raised several important questions regarding how to maintain motivation and effectiveness and identified potential risks (such as overloading themselves and burning out):

- When decades of work are completed, how inflexible have we become? Are we still capable of responding to changing circumstances, and if so, how effectively?
- How do we avoid the trap of being constantly in response mode to daily disruptions and sticking to strategies we have developed?
- How do we protect ourselves from burnout and what do internal organisational setups have to do with it?
- What is the nature of our relationship with external supporters, especially funding providers, and what would we like to see changed?
- What are challenging issues and concepts we deal with when working on peace and conflict?

It is impossible to convey a sense of the profound and enriching discussions that took place during the workshop. We therefore refer the reader to the detailed documentation “[South Asia – Western Balkan Peacebuilding Exchange](#)” on CNA’s website [nenasilje.org](#), which offers in-depth insights into the thematic discussions. However, here are a few highlights:

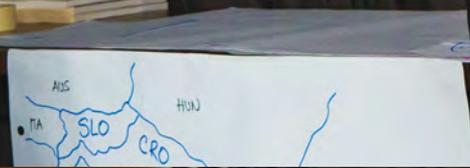
#### *Effectiveness and Risks of Burnout*

The group accepted that efficiency, defined as working in the most cost-effective manner, is important and a key element in institutional work. However, participants were convinced that efficiency should not be seen as a goal in itself. It was also mentioned that efficiency is not a synonym for effectiveness (which means: having an impact). On the contrary, in peace work, reaching the goal in order to be effective cannot always be done in the most efficient way. In order to be effective in a sense of “making a difference”, peacebuilders have to maintain the momentum and engagement over time. As they are working under difficult conditions, it is important to develop an awareness of the need for self-care; this includes individual self-care and collective approaches, as organisations are also responsible for preventing burnout. This issue was discussed intensively with many important insights: having clear ideas about who is responsible for what helps to decrease burnout, but also creates a safer environment for everybody, as everyone knows who to contact on specific issues and decision-making. Hierarchical structures are often opaque and increase stress. Accountability comes from less hierarchical structures. It is important to work in teams with mutual support. This means that if an issue is too much for an individual staff member to handle, they have someone to turn to. Professional help and counselling may also be required. Working on peace and justice is emotionally stressful and requires a working environment where it is understood that the political is personal and the personal is political. Mutual support within a team means seeing co-workers as people, not just as staff. Organisations can do a lot to prevent burnout by the way they organise working hours, make structures and procedures transparent, factor invisible and unforeseen tasks into planning, conduct appraisals, and introduce crisis and early warning strategies and other prevention mechanisms, such as creative reflective spaces and counselling. Donors need to understand that these mechanisms should be supported as prerequisites for effective work. Stress and burnout should not be taboo subjects in project discussions.



Bfdr South Asia U

- Focussed programme on strengthening local capacity for peace in South Asia
- Networks and exchange for learning environment
- Process oriented, not just projects
- Long term perspective and commitment for cooperation
- Trust and personal relationships
- Using different tools for support in order to increase effectiveness:
  - funding
  - support for lobby and advocacy in
  - training / exposure
  - consultancy support
  - ...



UNMM  
The Intervention of UNMM in Manipur.  
"Peace, Democracy, HR & Rule of Law."  
Why?

- People in Manipur/NE India were under Martial Law of Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act 1958. of decades.
- Organising ethnic cleansing, genocide, atrocities, mass raped by Indian Army.
- victims at the Centre.
- Racial Discrimination.

THEORY OF CHANGE / STRATEGIES

- Managing UNMM as Network of NGOs across ethnic Sub-nationalism/Nationalism & divide.
- Capacity Building on Lep, CT, DWP, UN Mechanism.
- Alliance Building
- Lobby WORK at Indian, Germany, EU MPs & UN.
- Submission of Report to UN Treaty Bodies & Special Procedures.
  - (a) Extrajudicial Execution
  - (b) Sexual Violence
  - (c) Land mine
  - (d) Child Soldier
  - (e) Army on Illegal trade.
  - (f) HR Defenders



### *Organisational Structures*

As peace work is aimed at long-term societal transformation, organisations need to ensure sustainability and continuity as well as a learning environment that enables the knowledge generated in an organisation to be shared. In larger NGOs, fieldwork and activities conducted from a “headquarters” need to be closely linked and all staff should have a common understanding of realities on the ground. Participatory organisational development, with special emphasis on the particular needs of organisations working in and on conflict and its transformation, is central for a responsive and self-reflective organisation. Evaluation processes need to be collective learning experiences rather than top-down exercises. Organisations need to live what they preach – also in terms of conflict sensitivity and do no harm principles. Codes of conduct (agreed on common ground) and their internal evaluation may be helpful tools.

### *Cooperation with External Actors*

The participants considered cooperation with external actors to be an important source of support and encouragement. This is possible when external actors respect the partner organisations and their staff, and when they act in a transparent way, share knowledge and enable capacity-building. External actors can help to create international solidarity that empowers local actors: they can help to set up cooperation also on a global level (global peace networks matter!). Furthermore, external actors can play a key role in increasing visibility, amplifying voices and providing security to peacebuilding actors. However, certain conditions need to be fulfilled in order to make cooperation with external actors successful. Particularly in donor-recipient relationships, some practices may hamper trustful and effective cooperation: several peace activists shared the experience that donor agencies have set up unnecessarily time-consuming and sometimes overly complicated bureaucratic processes that divert attention away from the task of peacebuilding. Some colleagues also complained about some donors’ insensitive behaviour and unrealistic demands and expectations, e.g. when NGOs were asked to display donor logos for visibility, even though this posed a threat to the organisation’s work. It was also reported that donor representatives and staff sometimes lack knowledge about local culture and conflict settings and therefore unintentionally do harm. Cooperation is often based on short-term project thinking, while the grassroots activists’ experience is that transformation for peace involves long-term processes which aim to change social and political structures and procedures, an approach which goes far beyond a project-based understanding. Frequent staff changes within donor agencies pose another challenge. Trustful relationships are required in peace work, and it takes time and effort to build trust. Several participants also reported disappointing experiences, where external partners were eager to impose their own interests, perspectives and organisational logic on local peace activists.

In order to constructively support peace activists external actors should be open for process orientation combined with readiness to acknowledge difficult and contradictory steps in project implementation. Amendments to goals and strategies are often necessary, as the reality can rapidly change in conflict-torn societies. Donor agencies that engage in such an environment



should therefore be flexible and enter into a close dialogue with those who are working in and on conflict. There is a need to develop and nurture a two-way culture of feedback between local and external actors. External actors who support peace activists need to see themselves as learning individuals and develop a high degree of self-reflection, as individuals and as organisations. Education of staff is urgently needed on an ongoing basis: people who are responsible for project funding in crisis regions should be trained in “do no harm” and conflict sensitivity, and they should be familiar with the relevant standards developed at the international level, e.g. Reflecting on Peace Practice (RPP) and other approaches. This would be extremely helpful and should be regarded as an continuous process in order to create a credible organisational culture.

## **4.2. Debates on Transitional Justice, Reconciliation, “Collective Responsibility”, Feminism, Theories of Change, and Effectiveness in Peacebuilding (Documentation)**

### **Large Barometer: Where is our Common Ground?**

The Large Barometer uses a larger number of statements (20-40) – at least as many as there are participants and up to twice as many. It is important that the prepared statements are relevant to the group and that they cover key controversial issues. The statements should be printed on individual pieces of paper in larger letters to aid easy reading. Pieces of paper with the statements should be arranged so that everyone can come up and see them; for example, they can be laid out in a line on the floor or placed along a larger conference table.

Each participant picks up at least one statement (or a maximum of two if you have twice as many statements as participants) and places it on the barometer between the opposite poles – for example, I agree and I don’t agree –based on his or her understanding of the statement. After the statements have been arranged on the barometer, participants are invited to look them over and make a note of those whose position they disagree with.

This is followed by a discussion: Would anyone change the position of any of the statements in the barometer? Why? What do others think?

Additional discussion rules:

- You may explain why you would change the position of a statement on the barometer, but you may not physically move a statement/paper placed by someone else.
- The aim is not to reach group agreement about what position would be ideal for a given statement, but to exchange opinions.

Statements on cards prepared by CNA:

(Statements that have been chosen for discussion are highlighted.)

1. European human rights do not match Asian circumstances.
2. Human rights and peace NGOs should be judged solely by their achievements.
3. You cannot do wrong if you combat injustice.
4. Foreign financial aid that we are recipients of strengthens our voices for peace and human rights.
5. Voices of victims of violence must be supported.
6. Digging up past wounds retraumatizes our society.
7. Strategies of human rights and peace NGOs are determined by donor policies.
8. Donors and recipients can have equal status in partnerships.
9. We have been doing this work for 20 years but nothing changes; this society is beyond repair.
10. Minorities are often the troublemakers.
11. Competition between NGOs enhances peace and human rights work.
12. Strong leaders pave the way to justice.
13. I still have the same vision of my work as 15 years ago.
14. NGOs' internal organisational style should not be a matter for public scrutiny.
15. The status quo suits the needs of NGOs.
16. NGOs should strive to become institutions.
17. Staff burnout affects productivity; NGOs should therefore take it seriously.
18. The organisations which can secure the greatest amount of financial support for their work are the successful ones.
19. The US government supports democracy and human rights.
20. Funding from the Russian state is OK if they do not interfere with organisational matters or project goals.
21. Every people has the right to secede.
22. Feminism harms the family.
23. Establishing democracy with military force is sometimes unavoidable.
24. The German people started the Second World War.
25. Laundry is women's work, but men should help.
26. Those who came first have the right to the land.
27. Sexual orientation is a private matter to be kept within your own four walls.
28. Manipur is the country of the Meitei people and all citizens that live in it.
29. We should help the West to become civilised.
30. The victim also bears responsibility for the conflict.

31. There is no such thing as collective responsibility.
32. International war crime tribunals have nothing to do with peacebuilding.
33. Nation-building is part of the reconciliation process.
34. Peace activism is pointless with powerful non-democratic geopolitical players.
35. Fundamentally, Islam is peacebuilding.
36. It is a human obligation to support Ukraine's just, defensive war.
37. No justice, no reconciliation.
38. Women leaders have proved to be more successful in peacebuilding.
39. Efficiency must be a first priority organisational guideline.
40. Organisational efficiency decreases with inclusion of enemies.
41. Accountability is created by clear hierarchical structures.

### First Session: Discussion on Statements from the Large Barometer

*Discussing the statement: "No justice, no reconciliation."*

- I believe that reconciliation is possible without full justice. And I also think there could be justice without reconciliation. That's why I don't agree with this statement.

- I have a feeling that society is obliged to provide a certain process for reconciliation. It can strengthen the voices of victims and provide space for memorialisation. That is very important. In former Yugoslavia specifically, we expected so much from the Hague Tribunal, but it did not deliver reconciliation. That is a lesson we need to learn. But there are so many other things that can be part of justice.

- Justice can mean many things. For some people, getting enough food is justice, and for some people, unless conviction of war criminals is there, there is no justice. Justice for all is not possible. Reconciliation can take place, and we can all work for reconciliation even if we may not get justice. We cannot wait for justice to happen in the process of reconciliation.

- Complete justice cannot be achieved because you cannot repair the harm done. The judiciary can only achieve this to a limited extent. This incompleteness is often used by people who reject reconciliation, and contributes to the recurrence of violence. It helps those who advocate for the continuation of discrimination and hatred. They know that irreparable damage has been done because lives are lost. And whatever punishment will come is not enough, in their view.

- I will give one example of how difficult it is to deal with this statement in peace work. We wanted to attend a commemoration of Bosniak victims at a site where hundreds of civilians had been killed by members of the Croat Army and families are still searching for the remains of 20-25 relatives. When we explained why we would come to hold a commemoration, we were asked: "Are any Croats coming?" and we confirmed this. They said: "First of all they should tell us where the remains of our family members are and after that we can go further." On a personal level, I completely understand them; it is really important that they find the remains of their family members. But on a societal level, this means that you're transferring the responsibility for that crime not just to one specific group of perpetrators but to the whole Croat population. However, a few years after this we visited this place again, and they accepted us.

- I would like to look at justice not just as a legal concept. In the Bible, there is a saying that justice and peace had kissed. And I think that we need this kissing of justice and peace. We also can't leave justice out. Social and economic injustices produce wars and are also obstacles to peacebuilding. We should understand justice as a social process of reducing inequalities to a level where the community has a basis to live together.

- I am struggling with a taboo in our society. In the debate on justice, I see a trend of idealising victims and their families in a moralistic way. Somebody can be hurt and still be wrong about the causes of their pain. And somebody could be a victim and pass on very wrong and harmful messages to the next generation. How can we respect somebody's pain and at the same time respect the need for truth and objectivity? When you are able to develop this kind of relationship, manipulation of victims and victims' associations may decrease, and the concept of collective guilt might lose its power.

*Discussing the statement: "International war crime tribunals have nothing to do with peacebuilding."*

- I would agree with this statement. When I came to the Balkans in the 1990s, the International Tribunal (ICTY) had been overloaded with expectations: to contribute to peacebuilding, to reconciliation, to deterrence of further crimes, non-repetition, etc. It was obvious that the Tribunal could not do all of this. I was sure that it would contribute to justice in the sense of focusing on perpetrators' responsibility, looking for the facts and trying to find out if this person is guilty or not, and that it might open some space for victims to speak out, which is important. But I was convinced that it would not contribute to a process of healing or to improving relationships. In Germany, we had the Nuremberg Trials after the Second World War. They were not contributing to peacebuilding at the time they were happening, but they provided a vast archive, and all this was very important for the next generation, for researchers and those who, later on, urged German society to face the past. I think – apart from prosecution of crimes – that the facts and data stored by tribunals can be used to set up a common set of facts that are not easily deniable.

- I think that the sentence "have nothing to do" in the statement is key. I think we cannot compare different international tribunals and their legacies. The archive or the legacy of the ICTY is still very much alive. It is not waiting for another generation to explore it; it is now used in many, many ways, not only by researchers in the academic field, but also by practitioners who rely on the facts that were established by this court in order to prepare their own actions. Exhibitions, for example. And I think that in an indirect way, but also in a direct way, the verdicts in this court have a lot to do with peacebuilding. Because we have the facts about perpetrators and victims, and about policies behind the crimes. Courts are providing a substantial amount of resources for practitioners. Some international criminal tribunals also contribute to the wellbeing of victims.

- I think that due to the lack of such international mechanisms, there is no accountability and documentation of what happened in many places around the globe. In Asia, we had the Khmer Rouge Tribunal, and it did provide some hope that people who committed crimes cannot just get away with it, for the generations to come. But in the region where I am from, we do not have such a mechanism. There was this huge massacre when Pakistan as a nation was taking shape. Before and after that, there was this mass killing of people on both sides. But there is no process of investigation and no accountability. In my generation, the narrative is saying: "They killed us, they killed us, they killed us!" although in reality both sides killed each other. There is no accountability, and I think that is a problem. It is important to have that kind of process, and to have data and documentation. I think that in the long run, this also contributes to peacebuilding.



- I believe in strong international institutions, providing mechanisms for people and nations who have been suffering. They can help a lot in peacebuilding. In 2005, I was in the Hague Tribunal. I was a few metres away from Slobodan Milošević, and when they brought him in in handcuffs I felt satisfaction, seeing the person who killed members of my family being imprisoned and being held accountable at the court. He died in prison without a final verdict, but still ... And in Kosovo and Serbia, many people live in fear that they are going to be brought to justice and might end up in jail. If I cannot bring them to justice, at least they live with that fear every day.

- If you ask me if war crimes tribunals are doing peacebuilding work: no, they are not, peacebuilding may be a side-effect. If you ask me if their work is needed: it absolutely is. What we actually need are translators, interpreters who would translate the work of trials into peacebuilding. Usually tribunals are not equipped with the sensibility for peacebuilding and reconciliation, so much more work is needed besides just finishing the trials.

- I would also like to talk about these side-effects. I agree that it was wrong to expect that the Hague Tribunal was going to resolve all our issues, and I agree that tribunals are needed. The situation with the Bosnian Court, which is also a hybrid court established by the international community, is as follows: they tried to block some of the side-effects that could lead to peacebuilding. It is working, there are trials going on, but it is so closed, there is no communication between the court and the broader public. They don't have any kind of PR experts who would transfer what is happening there to the outside world. An issue that is also problematic: the building in which the Court is established used to be a detention camp for Serbs and Croats during the war. And they don't know how to deal with it. If you are trying to serve justice, it is crucial that you mark that history of the building somehow, that you acknowledge the fact that it had been used as a detention camp. They don't know how to deal with this, so they try to block any kind of talk about that aspect.

- Undisputed facts are needed for peacebuilding. Establishing facts that are acknowledged and accepted by all sides is an important task that international war crime tribunals should fulfil. And I think that they have achieved this to a certain extent. But in some cases they have also damaged their own credibility. During the first five years of its existence, the Hague Tribunal had a very bad practice in public relations. Nothing was published in the Serbo-Croatian language; they did it all in English. Furthermore, I am convinced that peacebuilding cannot be brought in from outside; it has to grow from within our societies. I cannot blame the international court for us being incapable of doing so. They have contributed to justice to a certain extent; they gave us some good bases, but they also made terrible mistakes. It has given us the feeling that when they complete their work, healing and reconciliation will come by themselves. But they will not come by themselves. Other models that contributed to reconciliation in other places have not been looked at in the Western Balkans, because there was this strong focus on courts. In South Africa, they have chosen another model: a combination of a criminal court where the most responsible individuals were brought to justice; those of lower rank were invited to give full testimony, and would then be granted amnesty. Such a mechanism would have given us a factual history that cannot be disputed. I know that people in South Africa are not very satisfied with it. They missed the aspect of punishment, so I'm not idealising this model, but I feel we are left now with neither of the two.

- In Cambodia, they also had a tribunal for war crimes, and we have asked people over there what has been achieved by this mechanism. They were very critical, but they also said that the tribunal opened a space for civil society to engage in the process. Before, people could hardly speak about the conflict. But with the tribunal they got some space. In Bangladesh, they are trying to follow the South African model, but it is in a chaotic stage now. It is more political. They are trying to say that it is "international", but it is not.

*Discussing the statement: "Minorities are often the troublemakers."*

- I don't agree with this statement, and therefore put it in the middle. First, we need to understand what we mean by minority: is it based on religion, or on population numbers, or on power? Sometimes religious minorities may be troublemakers. But we cannot say that majorities are OK, and that minorities are troublemakers.

- This idea of minorities is complex. For example, the Brahmins who live in Manipur are a very small minority, but they behave like a majority by referring to the Indian mainland. One Brahmin academic stated that the armed forces were brought to power by them, and now people don't want it, so this is to be discussed with Brahmins in Manipur. Then, Bengali Muslims are a majority in Bangladesh, but migrant Bengali Muslims in Manipur are a minority. And they also behave in that manner. These minorities are often troublemakers from the political perspective.

- I agree that minorities are often troublemakers. I would like to thank the minorities for that, because they very often contribute to uncovering injustice in society. Minorities who escalate the problem are making it visible and can open the path to conflict transformation. I don't think that any minority is making trouble just for fun, but that there is a pressing issue behind it.

- In my context, we face a lot of difficulties. Small groups, in terms of population numbers, have no chance to go to university or college. And I think they should voice the problem constructively. If someone is stealing your rights, you have to stand up.

- The perception that minorities are the troublemakers is very popular; you can hear it and read it everywhere: "Minorities have more rights than we do." And we need to be careful about the language used: those who are in power are not minorities, but elite, and this is an important distinction.

- I think both in the Balkans and in South Asia, a challenging issue is that people who form a minority in one country are forming a majority in the other, and this also creates a complicated power dynamic.

- Thank you for making this distinction (about relationships between groups which are a minority in one state and majority in another state). I have to say it is a burden. It is a burden for Serbs in Croatia, if the neighbouring country (Serbia) is considered your homeland, and you are expected to behave like it is your homeland.

- I see the statement as very dangerous. Here in the Bosnian context, especially in debates on the Election Law, we can often hear people saying: "We are Bosniaks and we are a huge majority, and we have some Croats who are making trouble all the time, they are seeking certain rights, and we are giving them rights, and they are still not satisfied. And we are so fed up with them; we cannot deal with them any more. They are a minority of 15%. And we have a very complex political system just because they exist and make demands." When you have a huge majority of people who perceive themselves endangered by a minority, it is very dangerous; it could easily lead to violence.

*Discussing the statement: "There is no such thing as collective responsibility."*

- My first reaction would be to say yes, there is collective responsibility. The community bears the responsibility for the crimes that were done in its name. But there is a distinction between collective responsibility and collective guilt: there cannot be collective guilt, but yes, there can be collective responsibility, in a social or political sense. On the other hand, we should also connect or accept some identities that are imposed on us. I am to accept collective responsibility by profiling myself as a member of the Serbian nation while, at the same time, I

am trying to emancipate myself from that, I don't want to accept that kind of imposed identity. In other words: I don't express myself as a member of a "Serbian nation" or as a member of a "Serbian ethnic group". So if I accept that there is "collective responsibility", I accept this collective identity that is imposed on me. We're all expected to align to some sort of "collective identity" which was socially constructed and imposed on us. I have this kind of ambivalence, that's why I would put this statement somewhere in the middle.

- I think it is at the place where it should be. Unfortunately, there is no collective responsibility; people don't feel responsible for what happened in the Balkans – it's always someone else who is blamed and held responsible. And I think that there should be collective responsibility in the sense of feeling: I am responsible for society. As I was too young when the war started, I cannot take direct and personal responsibility, but I am certainly responsible now for how we deal with this past.

- My Serb identity is invented and imposed on me, but at the same time, I feel collective responsibility as someone who is recognised by others as a Serb. So, the perception of me by people from other communities due to my name or birth place forces me to assume this responsibility. And I acknowledge this. So, I cannot say I don't care, I am not Serb, because people may feel frightened just by hearing my name, people who experienced terrible things, committed by people who did it in my name. I cannot run away from it, and if I want to interact, I must accept the responsibility.

- Collective responsibility is distinct from guilt, of course. Being born, being raised as a member of a majority community in Macedonia, you get a lot of opportunities which minority communities don't get. We are looking back to a long period of discrimination against Albanians and Roma people. Although I also don't feel Macedonian and oppose the construct of Macedonian identity, I have to take the responsibility that comes with the opportunity of being born with a certain name and background as a member of the dominant community. These opportunities were not given to my Roma neighbours. So, in that sense, I have to accept the responsibility and show solidarity with them, and also with LGBT people, and others who face discrimination. There must be collective responsibility for what society is doing. When I go to the Albanian community, my name tells them that a Macedonian is coming, no matter how I feel about it. Now I accept it, but I want to show that I am a different type of Macedonian. I don't feel a strong identity, but I am embracing it in an activist sense.

- I also think that this statement should be somewhere in the middle. I grew up in a society ruled by Chakmas. I didn't have the idea that I am Chakma. Within this community, Chakmas are the majority and I never felt that I'm discriminating against other communities. So I was not aware of that concept before. Then I started to understand that Chakmas are dominating others. I am not doing that, but at a certain point in time I felt that, yes, there are some forms of discrimination going on, based on ethnicity. So I feel that we should recognise that. I can sensitise our community people: what you are doing is actually hurting people from the other community. And then we need a certain collective responsibility to deal with it. Nationalistic ideas are there. But we can change ourselves, helping to reduce discrimination or injustice against the other community.

- "Collective responsibility" also means taking care, providing for each other in the community. It can build on traditional practices and was very much part of enabling coexistence in many parts of the world. There is collective responsibility, not just from taking the responsibility for the conflict, but taking responsibility for being there, for supporting independence between communities.

*Discussing the statement: "Feminism harms the family."*

- I don't agree with this statement. Feminism cannot harm the family. In our context, sometimes there is this understanding of feminism that men are the main cause of discrimination, they are discriminating against women, this kind of destruction is there. And it is easy for men to find that feminism is creating a problem. If feminism is not understood as a concept that is actually liberating both men and women and liberating relationships between men and women in the system which is oppressive in itself, then it can lead to the perception that feminism is harming family or is producing conflicts. Then we will not get men as friends, which we actually want to have.

- We have the same problem here in the Balkans; feminism is being perceived as the enemy of the family in the first place. And it has something to do with the process that has been going on for the past 20 years. It moved backwards in a sense of "retraditionalisation" of roles of men and women and establishment of the man as provider for the family in a material sense, and also in security, the one who is there to protect. This is where we are now, which is very strange and different from what we had in the former Yugoslavia. Basically, in Yugoslavia the official ideology was that men and women were equal. This was not entirely true in real life, but still we had that notion and this is how we were brought up since our childhood. Now we have to fight against a revival of these very traditional views which perceive feminism as an enemy, not only of the family, but also of men in general.

- When we say feminism in Bangla we call it Nari Badi (woman-ism) and Nari Mukti (freedom of women). We are told that feminism is bad and it's because it is only about women's rights. And there is also a strong religious influence against feminism. Furthermore, there are ideologies which suggest that: "We don't need feminism, it is not time for women's rights now, we will do this later. Once we emancipate as a society, as a nation, from all these bad things, women's rights will automatically be established."

- I would put the statement in the middle: feminism may harm the family, and it may not. And somehow, we tend to assume that family necessarily consists of a man and a woman only, and that it has to be like that. I am also wondering whether "harming family" is something bad (?) If harming the family means changing the domination and abuse, then this is a liberation. So why should we protect a family that hurts people? For me, feminism is also about emancipation of men, of their roles, and women, of their roles.

- So that is really important. When people look from the perspective of patriarchy, they might perceive feminism as something negative. Through feminist activism, both men and women can equally grow. However, men and women can act equally harmfully, or be equally discriminating. There are a lot of women leaders who come with mindsets marked by typical patriarchal backgrounds, and they are equally harmful as men. Many women leaders are not even considering the rights of women. So in that sense, it's not about men and women, it's more about patriarchy.

I would like to draw your attention beyond families: if we look at the specific example of women's history in Manipur, its movement is a very symbolic form of feminism. In fighting against the British in 1904 and 1939, it was a very anti-colonial movement. If we look into smaller communities, like the Khasi in India, and Khasi in Bangladesh, and communities in Kerala, in India, some communities in China, which is not far away from the border, we will realise that they're matrilineal societies. Civil society needs to discuss women's history (on a more global level), which contributed to protecting the rights, political rights of peoples, sacrificing their lives. In the case of Manipur, for example, women are the key leaders in protecting their men: when the army comes to take a man from his home, all the women come out in protest. They are guarding the society.



*Discussing the statement: “Women leaders have proved to be more successful in peacebuilding.”*

- I agree with this statement. One of my experiences during the conflict between the Naga and Kuki communities in Manipur is that when we come together as women from different communities, even if we are not ready to accept the other positions, we will at least be ready to listen to each other. We were able to break barriers between the different communities. I am not a very religious person, but we took church as an entry point. We invited some elder women, Kuki women, to speak in the Naga’s church. And Naga leaders (women) would speak in the Kuki’s church. People from 17 different communities came together. It was one of the biggest events after all this bloodshed. Also, on Mother’s Day we organised an event where we invited religious leaders, and community leaders, and there was a lot of crying and a lot of laughing too.

- It is not always the case that women engage for peace. Women are also part of the system of patriarchy and may act in very harmful ways.

- I don’t agree with the statement. It depends on the perception of the society as a whole. For example, we even have a female prime minister and female ministers in Bangladesh, but we don’t see any useful initiatives by them, because, as you said, they are part of the system. They cannot do anything, and sometimes they do more harm than men.

- If the statement were “statistically women are...”, then I would probably agree. But it sounds like it is a fact, so I totally disagree.

- I am really convinced that there are many places where women’s initiatives are much more successful than men’s approaches (i.e. in the Pacific region). We must look at the context and make powerful examples more visible. But when it comes to women as leaders: working in the Balkans and other places, I met women who behaved as problematically as men, in their style of guidance and communication. I think women are not automatically better than men, neither as managers, nor as peacebuilders, but they bring in different perspectives.

## **Second Session: Fishbowl Discussion on Statements from the Large Barometer**

The Fishbowl is a method for discussing a topic or making a decision. The participants sit in a circle with four (to six) chairs placed in the middle of the circle to represent the “fishbowl”. During the exercise, only the people sitting in the fishbowl may speak. When someone wants to speak, they should approach the middle of the circle and touch the shoulder of the person they want to replace in the fishbowl. The person in the fishbowl may finish their sentence, but must then stand up and give their spot to the new speaker. A person who did not get a chance to speak in the “fishbowl” should not be replaced. The training team does not facilitate this process, except to warn the participants that time is running out. For this fishbowl, participants have chosen two statements:

- Digging up past wounds retraumatizes our society.
- Every people has the right to secede.

*Discussing the Statement: "Digging up past wounds retraumatizes our society."*

- I think that the past definitely retraumatizes our society. These graveyards here ... The next generation can also see these graves, and they can learn, and it retraumatizes. I don't know how we can heal the trauma; how can we deal with this digging up the past? Also, I saw your book: the war of memories. I was wondering: memories of war or war of memories? I need to read the book, but it is confusing me.

- We have named it intentionally because we feel that there is an ongoing war in our region (the Western Balkans), a cold war, using memory. Remembrance of the war became a tool to spread hatred and to continue the war against the others by using this memory. That's a very destructive way of dealing with the past. Therefore, I think that working on the past has the potential to be very destructive, to retraumatise, but it also has the potential for healing. It depends on how you deal with the past.

- Dealing with the past can be used or misused. We need to be careful. But there will be much more trauma if we try to forget something, especially in our (Western Balkan) context. In fact, I believe that we are who we are because of our past. Sometimes we are not happy with our past, but that is our past and we have to face it.

- You have to open a safe space for victims, and you have to recognise this pain. Like: I respect your pain, let's speak about your pain, but at the same time: how can I help you to get out of this position and not to be forever a victim? That is bothering me.

- I think that the past is always an object of political contestation and is part of establishing the key political actors. We should not leave dealing with the past to the most irresponsible ones, to politicians who will misuse it for their own purposes, which is what happens in our context. We try to develop the most responsible "do no harm" approach in dealing with the past of the 20th century, in the context of Serbo-Croatian relationships. (...) If you don't know how to learn from the past, you will not be able to influence the future of your generation, and the next one. There is a history of social injustice and if you are not willing to recognise the injustice, its victims and their pain, then it would be denied. And kids will grow up with the rage, with an anger and a wish for revenge that could be easily misused. In the war in the 1990s it was like that.

- I know for sure that we (in the Balkans) cannot agree on the past and its consequences. But even if we don't agree, having different interpretations, it's still a step further in dealing with the past if we talk about this. I was telling you in my presentation about those history books that have two versions of one event, so even if we can't agree about the past, maybe we can just hear the other interpretations of that event.

- I also think that allowing multiple views of the past is already a step forward. But most often there is a dominant approach that is selective. One side will create a narrative that avoids mentioning injustice committed in their name. The others will do the same. I would actually like to see an alternative way that is not selective. In our societies, there is a lot of selective perception, in the media, in our families, it is constantly there, this interpretation of the past, it is overwhelming, a dominant narrative, usually replicated. L said that it is impossible to have a joint view of the past. I don't agree. It is very difficult, and very far away, but I don't think it's impossible.

- We had an opposite approach after World War II in former Yugoslavia. The Communist Party said that we should sweep everything under the carpet, we will have just one victorious narrative about the partisans who fought for their homeland, and through this let's look into a bright future, and we should work for our future. Actually, when the political system collapsed, everything that had been swept under the carpet came out and was used as a sort of gasoline for a new war. Definitely, hiding everything under the carpet is not successful.

- Dealing with the past is hard, it hurts, it is complicated, but it might be very, very fruitful. I see that we cannot reach reconciliation unless we have some recognition and acknowledgement of the victims on all sides. And I am afraid to see how the past is misused by different ideologies and political movements that incite hate and tensions among people, and I think we must stop this.

- I think it is possible to talk about past events from a multi-perspective. Even in personal life, two of us can remember the same event differently and both views can be presented from a joint perspective. Digging up the past retraumatizes our society. We have a responsibility to do it constructively, we have an obligation to do that in a humane manner, with compassion and sensitivity.

- Dealing with the past is very important, also in our context in India. The ruling regime has openly praised the Nazis, Mussolini's ideology of race and superhumanity. Looking at the Moguls and the time of forced conversion of Hindus to Islam and the massacres that occurred: that's becoming very fresh, vividly coming into the minds of these Hindu leaders. Now they are preparing a response from the perspective of "one nation, one religion". "One nation" in India means the Hindu nation, and the dominant religion is Hindu. And the Indian military is one of the best trained military forces in the world, and it has very strong links with political forces in India. These forces may come back to power through elections in 2025. They may announce emergencies, and then many Muslims and other minorities, even the Hindu minorities, will have a problem. So, until now, people did not deal with the past constructively. And now we have to face it.

- I will talk about my context of Kuki and Naga. There are some leaders who would reject dealing with the past and say: do you want the 1990s to be back? If "digging" is done from that perspective, then it really becomes a problem. So, how can we manage to talk about the past in a constructive way that prevents bad things from happening again? However, digging up the past will definitely bring more sensitivity between us. And even if there are different understandings of truth and justice, remembering the facts is important, instead of keeping them under the carpet.

- In digging up the past, the issue is whose pain, trauma and tragedy are greater. Are your tragedy and trauma greater than mine? Or are my tragedy and trauma greater than yours? There are always tendencies to say: my pain is bigger, my loss is greater. And therefore the injustice that happened to me is far bigger. It is important that we recognise what happened in the past. I think that society, in a very organic, natural way, does it on its own. Over a period of time, families and community deal with the past in different ways. I have a feeling that there is a simultaneous process of healing that happens in society, naturally. So, I think we should also recognise that society heals itself over a period of time.

- Thank you for this additional perspective. Here in the Balkans, we have a competition over who is the greater victim, which is misused for political purposes. And we have a hierarchy of victims; there are victims who are accepted as such and victims who are unpopular. And the victims on the other side are not considered equal to ours. This political setup keeps us apart. This is my experience from commemorations at places of suffering, talking to the victims' families. It is important to acknowledge someone's suffering and loss. By doing so, you can help to ensure that a heavy burden is lifted; if people no longer have to hide their pain, they don't feel frustrated. Often then there is an opening which leads to reconciliation. If we had not talked about what happened 30 years ago in the Balkans, if we had not had an international tribunal and some of the facts established, at this point, we would face another hot war, similar to what is going on now in Ukraine. So at least I hope that everybody realised that it's really necessary to speak about such things.

- I agree with the statement: digging at past wounds will traumatise the whole society. I think it's always a risk. But it depends on how it is done; it should not be done in a way which triggers new conflict and violence. I also agree with L's statement, who said that facing the past is one of the basic preconditions for reconciliation. And I am reflecting on N's statement that a joint view is possible. L also said something along those lines. I remember a statement by Alex Boraine (who once headed South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission and was later Director at the International Center for Transitional Justice in New York). He said that as a precondition for reconciliation, any society that went through atrocities needs to agree on a set of facts which cannot be denied. And apart from that, it is necessary to accept different views on the past and to create a sort of empathy for accepting that. So I think that it makes sense to work for that, to create empathy, but not to overload oneself with the idea of creating a "joint perspective" on the past.

- I want to refer to what you said, M: I actually disagree. I think it is very, very easy to establish a joint view on the violent past at least on a personal level, an honest and fair view. It is very simple if there are trust and good intentions, and if you actually want to do it. I am not sure whether it is possible to achieve that on a societal level. But I don't want to give up this vision, that this is something worth striving towards. It very much depends on who is doing it, and with what intentions.

- I would just say it's very ambitious. In a personal setting you might agree on a joint view, but I am not sure that we can expect it to happen on a societal level. There is a variety of experiences that people had, being a victim, being a perpetrator, or both. If there is no empathy for this, then reconciliation will not happen. Acknowledgement of victims on all sides and healing processes are needed. I am just referring to the idea of a joint vision of the past on the societal level. I think this is too much for organisations to achieve, to achieve in your lifetime.

- In our work with war veterans in the Balkans, who fought on different sides in the recent war, empathy creates the common ground, and then they feel they are reconciled. And still there are different interpretations of facts; they can agree on the facts, but their interpretations are different. This can cause retraumatisation, but there is a strong bond, nevertheless. It is a process.

- I am impressed by the work you are doing with war veterans, in particular by the strong will for peacebuilding that these guys have. It seems that this kind of readiness for peacebuilding is something that helps them cope with traumatic experiences. I really think that one could learn a lot from this approach.

- I completely agree that trust is a precondition for constructively dealing with the past. Ten years ago, many people in Serbia said publicly that the Srebrenica genocide didn't happen. Afterwards, many admitted that it happened but they insisted that there were only 2,000 victims. Then it gradually happened that the narrative was shifting towards the facts. In Macedonia, for a long time, many people did not admit that there was systematic political discrimination against Albanians. Today, many people say: yes, there was, they were treated as second-class citizens, they were humiliated. So narratives and views can change.

- Although I am not very optimistic in regard to a joint view of the past, I also believe it's possible. I mean, we are in Europe, which has that experience of World War II, with a lot of different roles, experiences and memories. We know that there are positive examples of countries that managed to adopt a joint view of the past, after a very long process. I am wondering whether it will be possible for us here to reflect back on the 1990s, and say: okay, we all think that this is what happened. There are examples of countries that prove that this is possible. So, why not here?

*Discussing the Statement: "Every people has the right to secede."*

- I would position this card in the middle of the barometer. I see that there might be good reasons for people who have been oppressed to say: okay, we are looking to exit, we want to get out, we really want to secede from that state. The problem is that there are plenty of countries in the world where minorities might have this wish, and if they were to secede they would create geographical units with other minorities who might not agree to that. The dissolution of Yugoslavia is a good example. We need international regulations for secession, and mechanisms where such issues can be negotiated and settled in accordance with certain norms and standards, in a peaceful manner. But we don't have these mechanisms so far, and therefore it is very risky to agree with the statement. I would say: be careful and be aware which explosive box you will open, and check whether you could find other solutions that guarantee autonomy or more self-determination within an existing political entity.

- I don't see any problems being resolved by secession; the actual issues will most likely remain on a different scale. And finally, I would love to have internationally valid criteria that say – then you can, then you can't. The history of Yugoslavia doesn't really give me much argument in favour. I wouldn't like to take this right away from any group, but I am struggling with a dilemma. I'm rather disappointed that during the struggle for secession in our region, there were some human rights organisations which were fighting for the rights of people that were truly oppressed due to their ethnic belonging. But once the secession happened and others were in a minority and subjected to human rights abuse, the same organisation didn't do a thing: "So, sorry, I'm not for human rights of Serbs." Human rights are for humans, not just for Serbs, not just for Croats or anyone else. I feel this mechanism of human rights was abused to produce new injustice and just tipped the balance to the other side. This is not what I want.

- We have a similar example in Asia: Bangladesh parted from Pakistan and was formed in the name of Bengali identity, but then Bangladesh treated its ethnic minorities in a similar way as Pakistan had been treating them. Another example, in our region, is the Chakma community. Although a minority in numbers, it is the dominant one and often discriminates against ethnic minorities within that minority community, the sub-minorities. More or less the same thing. Okay, "every people has the right to secede", but once you secede, what comes next? How does that translate into more justice, ensuring a new identity of a new nation that is just to all people? Doesn't it replicate the system that suits the majority in that new nation? We start to discriminate against a so-called lower caste, and this will again dominate and discriminate against the sub-caste within the broader so-called lower caste, and many other lower castes within it, and so start to do the same thing. We can see more examples. Pakistan came out of the sub-continent and within Pakistan, the conditions there for the majority community are the same as they are in India, or in Bangladesh, or Nepal, or Sri Lanka. We have the right, but the question is: will a new nation based on identity pave the way for a more equal and just future for everybody?

- I agree with the statement "Every people has the right to secede", but I think it is not the way to solve the problems. If we split from the nation, nothing will happen. Even if we become independent, the minorities' feelings will remain, because there are strong feelings of discrimination. Now people say that if we get independence, a kind of self-determination, the Chakma will get most of the opportunities. Why should we struggle for self-determination? These kinds of feelings have to be dealt with in a just way. Otherwise, you get mistrust and war.

- We need to secure a world where people's rights and human rights are being respected. We need to have a mechanism for this. That is one bottom line to this discussion. The other bottom line is: how do people organise themselves in terms of identities? And this is so complicated because there are complex histories of identities; they have been constructed, changed and reconstructed. I learned so much from India, in particular from the Naga nation, consisting

of many sub-communities who do not even speak a common language. So I found out that members of the Naga nation represent themselves as “people” internationally, but actually they consist of many peoples again. They came together and declared themselves as Naga, as one nation, in order to increase their political impact. I am giving this example to say that “people” is a construct. This construct can be extremely useful to ensure human rights, and it can also be extremely disastrous and go along with violation of human rights.

- When I read the statement: “Every people has the right to self-determination”, it comes to my mind that the concept of the nation-state was a progressive concept at the time when it was introduced; it helped people to overcome feudal kingdoms and to establish some kind of bourgeois or even democratic systems giving space for people to exercise their rights. For some strange reason, this nation-state concept was later on attached to the idea that one nation should consist of one people, which is actually never the case. So now, in some contexts we face a concept of a nation-state which is conceptualised ethnically, even though in practice it never has been. In other regions we face post-colonial states with problematic borders. Countries in Africa, for example, have been drawn by the colonial powers on the map, with straight lines that don’t make sense. Peoples are divided between countries. Would it make sense for them to start claiming the right to secede and to form new nation-states? What would we gain? We would just create many more wars. So we live with the legacies of this colonial history, which is bad. At the same time, our friends from Bangladesh, and Northeast India tell us: we live in these kinds of conglomerate nation-states, but we are heavily discriminated against, and human rights are being violated. And we find it extremely useful to have international mechanisms, for instance, a UN convention protecting the rights of indigenous peoples, based on national identity, in order to increase human rights of all communities. And I think those whose human rights are being violated should have the space to refer to their “national identity” in order to struggle for their rights to be respected, but not at the expense of other people and their rights. We have to deconstruct both nationalism and national identity at the same time.

- Some remarks from a Bosnian perspective: a peace agreement can ensure that one community will not secede but that it will have autonomy. And if you say you’re going to secede, you can’t do it without war. Abolishing an autonomy that has been granted under a peace agreement may also lead to war. Over here, the biggest fear is that the national state will collapse and that some part of the state will declare its independence, and then others will become a minority which will not be respected. On the other hand, if there is a community within the state that wants to secede, you can’t simply neglect the problem. If you ignore that, arguing that we are a majority and have the political power, you will also have a problem – at some point it will escalate.

### Third Session: Organisational Issues, Efficiency and Effectiveness: Discussing Statements from the Large Barometer

*Discussing the Statement: “Efficiency must be a first priority organisational guideline.”*

- What do you mean by efficiency? You are organised on time, you send a report, everything is done in a timely manner, without looking at the quality? Efficiency cannot be the only criterion. My personal experience is that you don’t have to be efficient at the very beginning. I learn by doing, and am still learning. Efficiency will come as you grow.

- I don’t agree with the way the statement is phrased, putting efficiency as a first priority. But I don’t completely disagree, because I think that efficiency is important in our work. It is important to set up milestones, and to know how efficient you are. But I would never call it

number one. The process is important. Sometimes I would spend a lot of time with a specific person, which leads nowhere, but still, it is good work. In someone else's assessment, it would not be efficient work, but in my opinion, it is; it may prove fruitful later on. Sometimes we might not achieve the goals, but it is nevertheless important just to be present in a certain process and spend time with people.

- I would distinguish between efficiency and effectiveness. Efficiency means working in the most cost-effective manner, by investing as few resources as possible. Effectiveness means achieving the goal. And sometimes reaching the goal cannot be done in an efficient way.

- I also see this difference. Effectiveness is about impact, and efficiency is how you balance your resources. In my view, it is necessary not just to do it in a cost-effective way, but to be sure that what you are doing is exactly what you can do best, and that it makes sense. And you should do it in such a way that you don't lose your energy, in order to prevent burnout. I think efficiency in that sense is very important, but I wouldn't say it is the first priority. It comes out of organisational processes, and people find ways to do that or not.

- I fully agree with the statement, because I see efficiency in connection with time. I am writing projects for my organisation, putting in everything valuable "to do", and then we face obstacles and cannot do everything that we wanted to do. However, proper planning on the project and programme level is a must, not only annually, but more often, in order to have a strategic plan which can be revised and adapted. And you need to have some guidelines. So effectiveness depends on how well you are implementing your plan.

- I also agree with the statement, from the perspective of project management and reporting to the donors. Everything we do is measured against specific indicators and if you don't meet them, you are not efficient, in their view. Everything is measured by numbers, even by the number of likes on your Facebook posts. Efficiency is defined in terms of the costs. I spent some time solving a difficult situation and the effect was good at the end, but how to explain this in numbers? So I give a report with numbers. Most international organisations ask you to present a "narrative report" which is basically a statistical report.

*Discussing the Statement: "Organisational efficiency decreases with inclusion of enemies."*

Working with people who are considered as "enemies" could close some doors. Maybe some alliances shouldn't be made, but then it will take a longer time to establish change in the society. So I completely disagree with this statement.

- I remember situations when it was impossible to make a joint decision in our organisation. However, I still think that including people from the "other" side in the long run enriches you and makes you stronger. But it is part of the development. And it may happen that you are unable to find common ground in some periods.

- Definitely, the process will go slowly, especially in terms of decision-making, and it might be inefficient. But in the long run, it will increase the general capacity of the organisation.

- In our context, we are conflicting with the government and with the majority groups who have the power. So if you include them, you can't do anything, you must obey what they want. You will be helpless. We should engage with them, but sometimes it is really challenging. It depends on the context.

*Discussing the Statement: "Accountability is created by clear hierarchical structures."*

- I do not agree. In our organisation, with five or six people working together for more than 20 years, we don't need any hierarchy because we have certain responsibilities. But in organisations where interpersonal relationships are not at the level they should be, you need to have some hierarchy in order to determine who is responsible for what.

- I agree that horizontal management or horizontal ways of working can be more beneficial than a vertical one. However, I saw both positive and negative examples. I saw organisations struggling with horizontal structures. Some kind of mechanism needs to be in place to ensure that everybody accepts responsibility in their respective areas of work.

- Most of the groups in which I have engaged were horizontal. But we always struggled with informal structures, like somebody was more powerful by being there longer, or due to the agenda, etc. It is really important to take care of this informal hierarchy. But I would never say that accountability is a result of the hierarchical structure. I am not standing 100% on "I don't agree", and I would not argue that less hierarchical structures will increase accountability, I also see the risks: working in a horizontal structure can mean that everybody is responsible and nobody is responsible. Everybody should know whom to address for specific decisions. Being clear about who is responsible for what creates a safer environment for everybody and helps to reduce burnout.

- I work in a very vertically structured organisation. Nevertheless, some pretend that "we are very horizontal", and I don't like this. Another example: we have a political party in Croatia that is based on a horizontal structure, but it is obvious that they have an informal charismatic leader. One should be honest about these things.

- I also worked in a hierarchical institution for 20 years. In my experience, as a leader, I will transform my responsibility to those who work for me. This is very important to have in mind when we are speaking about hierarchy. I also worked in horizontal structures, and I felt that responsibility is much more easily assigned, and people are aware that they will get their team colleagues into trouble if they don't do their part of the work.

- In my view, it would be a defeat to say that people cannot assume their responsibility unless someone controls them to ensure that they do so. I want to work with equals together in a team, and it gives me great pleasure to share responsibility. It is very important to know exactly who is in charge of what. But at the same time, it is important to know that you are not on your own and there is someone you can rely on if it is too much for you. You are free to shout: I can't manage this, can we please reschedule our tasks. This protects you from burnout.

#### *Discussion on Burnout and Burnout Prevention*

Burnout and how to protect ourselves and others from it was a very important and pressing issue for many participants. They discussed this in small groups. Some of the findings are listed in Annex 2.

### 4.3. Closing Session: What Can We Do For One Another?

- We should share information according to our needs, from offering an explanation, or sending something, or connecting, up to partnerships in projects and programmes. Let's share more details on strategies, how we are working, what works, what doesn't work.

- I think we have learned a lot and shared a lot with each other. It was very important to address the issues of protection and education, protection of people who are in danger. And we need to educate the masses to become more aware. We have an Albanian saying: You don't need to protect your daughters from violence, you need to educate your sons. So we need protection but at the same time we need education. I see a lot of opportunities here.

- I am also thinking about security: international support and solidarity are important, writing letters, memorandums.

- CNA and what they do is very interesting for us (in Manipur). These are different contexts, but it may give us some idea of what we can do in addition to what we are doing. I also believe in nonviolent protest, struggle against injustice and autocrats, it is really powerful. We try certain techniques, but we are still in a process of learning how it works, like conflict-analysing tools, and we have developed conflict transformation as a strategy. We can share that; however, for security reasons we don't make these things visible.

- I feel enriched in many ways: for me, here in the Balkans, India is no longer just a state far away, I have a sort of personal connection now, I know at least one, two, three persons from that state. This is important, and also that there is a sort of network for information-sharing. It is great to have somebody at some place to ask what is happening there. Somebody you know and trust.

- N said that for him, India is not so far away any more. We need to come closer together, because it gives us the space for empathy. So I will ask you many questions, via email, or whatever, and ask for more information and help, and I'll offer some help where it is possible.

- I think it would be useful to set up a sort of pool of resources from which we can draw when we are in need, and where you can put whatever you think is important for the others.

- Yes, that would be my need also, and we should do more to share feminist approaches. Balkan women have a long tradition of home-grown feminism, not an imported one, with very strong bonds and networks which we can open and share. So in whatever way we can support you, please count on us.

- For me, in India, it would be important to get deeper into the question: How do we make our work more inclusive, and how can we transfer grassroots experiences to the mainstream?

- We should talk more about our blind spots and difficulties with allies. E mentioned that there is a gap between human rights and peacebuilding which didn't turn up in our discussions so far. I see this gap also in our context. I am looking at J because she works in the "transitional justice corner", which is strictly divided from the peacebuilders' corner. Seriously, we did not talk about the theory of change that stands behind these approaches. We need to talk about this because I think sometimes we hamper each other.

- From the Balkans and CNA we can take these skills of training, developing critical thinking, and reflecting from different perspectives. This is very good. Those of us who are from Northeast

India, Manipur, can offer experience in dealing with armed forces and the military. And all together we should exchange on the new context in the world, in Ukraine, Myanmar, China, etc. I think that the German parliament and Bread for the World can be helpful in developing a specific focus on the policy of the European Union and peacebuilding perspectives in these regions.

- What worries me a lot, even if we have not been talking about it much, is the war in Ukraine, and the upcoming new international power shifts. It is not just Russia and NATO being in a huge conflict, but this has also impacts on other actors, looking at China. What will be the next step in a process of breakdown of multilateralism and global confidence in multilateral and international institutions? We should somehow try to stay in touch and share our thoughts on this issue, as it will probably affect our work in the future.

- I am very much afraid of the dissolution of the international order. It's not a perfect international order, it's not even good, but in respect of not having one, it really makes me rather anxious.

- I would love to stay in touch with all of you, not only because I like you, but because I have a feeling that it has to be that way. If I look at the world, it's obvious that military and war industries are much better interconnected than peace workers, peacebuilders are. We should think about how to strengthen our connections. Furthermore, I would love to learn more about the methods of conflict analysis that our friends from Bangladesh developed, so if you have anything in writing, I would be grateful. I actually think that my experiences and knowledge are so locally based, and I am still not very convinced that I have a lot to offer. But we can sit and look at it, and search for support for that. Finally, I realised that we didn't exchange anything on music!

- I have a song, its name is U's song for D, it is brief, don't be afraid:

"Purity was never there in the first place –

there was not even a first place itself.

Not all of our pain was harm.

Still the river of life flows."

## **4.4. Final Remarks by the Moderating Team**

*By CNA-Team*

It is a minor miracle that after being postponed several times, this event has finally happened. There were moments when it seemed almost impossible, due to the Covid-19 travel restrictions and the war in Ukraine. We are sorry that our fellow activists from Pakistan, Nepal and Sri Lanka weren't able to join us, but we are grateful that the others made the effort for this to happen. The group was gathered an enormous amount of experience. Some of us knew each other from before, some are active in the same region (Western Balkans) but not necessarily from the same context, and occasions for us where we can exchange at this level are rare. Having the opportunity

to learn something completely new from the struggle and actions of friends from the other side of the planet (South Asia) was an extraordinary event for us. We realised that we are not alone or lonely in our activism and efforts to build a better and more just society. Openness, a willingness to communicate, commitment and motivation within the group were the main characteristics of our exchange. And we found it particularly empowering to have women playing a prominent role in our group, as this is exactly what our societies lack. Learning and getting to know a specific context and talking to people who live and work in it was an appropriate model for this encounter. The study visit provided information on the local context and helped to build trustful communication and to prepare for deeper exchange. Emotional exchange was very important; it encouraged us to discuss sensitive issues. In the Western Balkans, we rarely have an opportunity to discuss these issues in wider groups.

We had excellent working conditions and we were all fully committed to this exchange, understanding the uniqueness of the opportunity given to us. Therefore, the flexible concept was relatively easy to adapt to the needs expressed by participants. Engaged representatives of Bread for the World brought us together and were present. We have seen that this kind of exchange can contribute to better mutual understanding and analysis of specific problems and obstacles, and provide incentives to overcome them. We would like to have more opportunities like this, not only for ourselves, but also for our friends and fellow activists around the world. In-depth exchange on strategies and approaches among organisations operating in different and difficult contexts are very important and urgently needed by activists. Particular importance should be given to topics related to dealing with the past. We should think about a follow-up, maybe with teams from other regional contexts: involving colleagues from Ukraine, South Africa or Argentina, for example, might prove particularly fruitful. The growing number of “fires” that need to be extinguished on this planet is fragmenting our attention and commitment, and this is why these opportunities are important. It is crucial to learn from one another’s successes and failures, brilliant concepts and misconceptions. From time to time, we need to remind ourselves of the foundations of our work and empower each other to support change at all levels of society.



# Annexes

## Annex 1: List of Abbreviations

|          |   |
|----------|---|
| ARBiH    | Army of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina  |
| BiH      | Bosnia and Herzegovina  |
| CNA      | Centre for Nonviolent Action (Sarajevo/Belgrade)  |
| CSO      | Civil Society Organisation  |
| DPA      | Dayton Peace Accord   |
| EU       | European Union  |
| EUFOR    | European Union Force (mission within the EU's Common Security and Defense Policy 2004-2012; due to the current political situation a new follow-up EU-mission – EUFOR Althea – has been implemented in June 2022) |
| HV       | Army of Croatia   |
| HVO      | Croatian Defence Council, Army of Herzeg-Bosna (formed in Bosnia-Herzegovina during the war 1992-95)  |
| ICTY     | International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia   |
| IFOR     | Implementation Force (international multilateral peace force which replaced the UNPROFOR mission of the United Nations in BiH in December 1995)   |
| JNA      | Yugoslav People's Army (Army of the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia)  |
| NATO     | North Atlantic Treaty Organisation  |
| OSCE     | Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe   |
| SFOR     | Stabilisation Force (NATO-led multinational Force deployed to BiH after the war in 1995; several non-NATO countries contributed troops to this mission)   |
| SFRY     | Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia  |
| UN       | United Nations  |
| UNPROFOR | United Nations Protection Force (UN Mission to BiH 1992-1995)   |
| VRS      | Army of the Republic of Srpska (formed in Bosnia-Herzegovina during the war 1992-95)  |



## Annex 2: Discussions on Burnout and Burnout Prevention

### *Burnout symptoms*

- Impatience
- Fear
- Depression
- Irritability
- Frequent anger
- Trauma
- Helplessness
- Short temper
- Lack of motivation
- Trembling
- Constant self-criticism
- Moodiness
- Non-functional behaviour
- Withdrawal
- Auto-pilot
- Exhaustion
- Disgust
- Self-pity
- Euphoria
- Mind fog
- Destructive behaviour against ourselves/others
- Irrational overthinking
- Deprivation
- Isolation
- Feeling of being under too much pressure
- Lack of self-confidence
- Perfectionism
- Addictions

### *Burnout causes*

- Gaslighting
- Trauma
- Unreasonable expectations
- Helplessness
- Humiliation observed and experienced
- No supervision
- Overwork
- Non-democratic organisational structure
- Authoritarian leader
- Lack of recognition
- Lack of solidarity
- Bullying
- Lack of security
- Uncertain context
- High commitment
- Idealism
- Too much pressure
- Culture where overworking is praised
- No safe space
- Overload
- Lack of capacities
- Competitive environment
- Constant multi-tasking
- Lack of needs assessment
- No psychological support
- Lack of feedback
- Perfectionism
- Addictions

### **Burnout: Lessons learned**

Work in three small groups. Exchange on burnout and its effects on organisations. Collect lessons learned on flipcharts.

### *Group 1*

- Team solidarity may help
- Clear responsibilities
- Protect other people in the organisation
- Discuss and share problems
- Sometimes you can not help
- Do not allow to slip into the role of doctors
- Set up support structure outside organisation
- Adapt and improve organisational structure
- Flexible working hours
- Feedback, SWAT analysis
- Avoid high stress exposure or limit
- Serious formats of appraisal

### *Group 2*

- Cause: „Working against your own people“
- Internal pressures should be channelled/ shared with the team, so they can offer support
- Including unforeseen and invisible tasks into the planning
- Making boundaries to unrealistic expectations
- Constantly raising the issue of burnout and training for prevention of burnout
- Educating leaders about burnout
- Personally making a boundary, taking mental brake
- Mainstreaming discussion on prevention of burnout in wider peace community
- Put a psychological support for staff in the budget
- Institutionalised survey on psychological pressures in the organisation (annual)
- Donors to openly discuss challenges of burnout with their partners

### *Group 3*

- It is others who recognize your burnout
- Burnout can be consequence or the cause of the mobbing (power structure)
- Women are more exposed
- Possibly there will be a moment when you just give up / 1 can not save everybody
- Try to recognize early warnings
- Be aware of the possible effects of context frustrations
- Lack of support for decision making positions
- Speaking about it in a private or professional environment
- Not prevented burnout can generate conflicts or at least misunderstanding and spoil relationship
- Establishing crisis procedure → advanced protocol, culturally appropriate → educating for it
- Times for reflecting (often)
- Additional educating (never enough)
- Retreats
- Learning, listening, expressing (trainings)
- Support of the colleagues is very important in situations of mobbing and burnout
- Be nice, be gentle to yourself and others