

Training, training... and action!



Here are the happy faces (well, one trainer hid behind a sun, but...) of the Peace Messengers seminar prep team, who met beginning of March to finalize the seminar's programme and select applicants. Tricky tasks, but we're now looking forward working together (and have a bit of fun) with the participants!

But if you were not selected, or couldn't consider applying, there are other opportunities to gain skill in Peace education and as a Peace messenger, within and outside SCI. Besides the Travelling Workcamps we mentioned in last issue, two training seminars are planned in the next months (see below); other organisations also offer training opportunities, such as UNOY (check their webpage : <http://www.unoy.org/>).

It is however all very good to train and gain new skills, at the end of the day we should actually take action. There are many ways you could do so (see for instance the anti-NATO actions to which SCI activists will take part, page 4) ; in this issue, we decided to present two volunteers' experiences, one moving to another continent, the other taking action in her own community (page 2 to 4). We hope you will find it inspiring; we also hope that this will encourage some of you to share their stories and experiences as peace activists : SCI as a global movement has an abundance of experiences of all kind in this field !

OTHER TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

SCI-Germany will organise two training seminars on Peace education in the coming months:

- From **9th - 15th April**, in cooperation with VCV Serbia (and with among other Ivana, Macedonian Peace Messenger, as trainer) , SCI-Germany will be organising both a standard & advanced **PVP-groupleader training** in Halle, Eastern Germany. Participation is limited to volunteers from South-Eastern Europe and Germany, and the seminar is already full ; we will report about it in next issue of the Peace Messengers' newsletter.

From **4th – 24th August**, SCI-Germany will be organising a **PVP-Travelling Workcamp** in Germany. It will start with an 8-day training in Berlin, followed by 10 days of visits to various international workcamps in Germany & neighbouring countries. Afterwards participants will meet together again for a common evaluation. Due to funding rules most participants will be from South-East Europe and Germany, but there will be 4-5 reserved places for volunteers from other countries. So keep an eye on workcamps' lists and apply as soon as possible !

PEACE ACTIVISM BEYOND THE WORKCAMP- HERE AND AWAY

In this issue, we interviewed Daniel, who organised peace education workshops in Mexico, and Anaële, who visited Belgian schools to raise awareness on the Palestinian- Israeli conflict and peace prospects.



Volunteering for peace as an outsider Daniel (OWA-Poland) in Mexico



What was your experience in Peace education in Mexico?

Well I went to Mexico in September 2008 and stayed there till mid December 2008. I was a volunteer of One World Association and VIVE MEXICO, sponsored by Department of Foreign Affairs of Poland. Initially I was planning to do some workshops about global issues but it was a sort of vague idea. But on the September 15, Mexican Independence Day, two bombs exploded in Morelia. 7 people died and over 150 were injured. After that incident CECyTEM (the headquarter of the school I worked in) decided to introduce some elements of peace education. Taking in account my experience in SCI and in other peace organization I just decided to do it. So that is how it started. In total I conducted 10 workshops about peace and also initiated a peace group that was after classes to prepare some peace event.

What would you say was your contribution/added value as an outsider?

Well I'm tempted to say that there wasn't any. The only thing I had, was an experience in non-formal education and peace education. But my experience was "European" if not to say "Polish" only. So the main question was how an outsider should teach about peace in Mexico. I had nothing to teach them, because they know much better what the problems are in Mexico. Not mentioning cultural differences and maybe even different concept of peace. So instead of preaching, I decided to listen, decided to create space for those young people to talk about peace, to create their own definition of peace and at the end to find their own "recipe for peace". And I found it to be the best way. I gave them a structure of the workshop, they came up with the content.



What lessons and conclusions did you draw from this experience?

I learned a lot from it, though it the biggest lesson is kind of ironic. I learned that teaching about peace is important but this is not the only way. While being in Mexico I was also organizing some cultural events connected with English e.g. Christmas Carol Festival. And I was just watching those kids working on their songs. And there was so much peace in their cooperation. There were conflicts among the group but they could be solved. So the conclusion I got from it is that working together with people and working as a group is the best practice of peace. Of course if we choose to do it in a peaceful way :) it sort of like SCI workcamp - working together within a spirit of peace.



In Palestine (first left)

Volunteering for peace in your community : Anaële (SCI-BE) in Belgium

Anaële, a long-time SCI-Belgium volunteer, spent 9 months in 2008 in Bethlehem and Nablus, in Palestine, in the framework of the European Volunteer Service. Hardly was she back in Belgium that the Israeli army launched its attack on Gaza. What could she do to support peace and her Palestinian friends from Belgium? A story of spontaneous peace activism that went well beyond her initial expectations.

A few days after my return from Palestine, Israeli attacks on the Gaza strip began. They turned quickly into a real slaughter, about which the Western world reacted very late and with only vague condemnations. These events were reinforcing the guilty feelings I was experiencing since I had left Palestine, and in a way abandoned friends in a difficult situation.

I had to do something. Without really believing it would work, I sent an email to all my contacts, writing that I was ready to come and talk about my experience in Palestine in schools or to any kind of group. I hoped to talk to 3 or 4 classes. To this day I held 56 talks, and it isn't over yet. My mail circulated eerily quickly, and reached people who weren't able to tell me how they heard about me.

In order to invite me, teachers often have to overcome reluctance linked to the sensitivity of the topic, and yet, I was often asked to spend 6 or 7 hours in a school, or to come back several times. It was actually at a time when the conflict was no longer only news on TV and was having effects in Brussels' and other cities' streets. Oversimplifications were rife (a caricature could be: all Jews were slaughterers, Arabs, terrorists and fundamentalists, with beards, and Belgians, heartless who didn't care about people dying if it did not happen in Europe).

Teachers don't feel comfortable addressing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (very seldom tackled in Belgian schools), and appreciate to have an outsider coming to talk about it. Students listen to me and believe me because I've spent 9 months over there. And that's where my task becomes tricky; students take what I say as gospel truth and react in a very emotional way. I thus had to talk very carefully and qualify my words, in order not to create new simplifications in their minds. I usually do not believe in neutrality, and am used to a militant approach, but in classrooms, I do not express a clear cut opinion. I start from the facts (with a little historical introduction), I let young Palestinian talk (by showing a video), and then, students react. And the discussion can move to hopes of peace, violent incidents that took place during pro-Palestinian demonstrations in Belgium, extremists of both sides, international organisations...

" I had to do something. Without really believing it would work, I sent an email to all my contacts, writing that I was ready to come and talk about my experience in Palestine"

" all Jews were slaughterers, all Arabs, terrorists and fundamentalists, with beards, and all Belgians, heartless who didn't care about people dying if it did not happen in Europe"

What I'm interested in is to show young Palestinians' daily lives, away from what you see in media. Besides, to me it is important to put forward the peace trends and movements that do exist in both Israeli and Palestinian societies; media show enough of the conflict, violence, people acting with a

war-like approach... Young people are touched by these stories of parents' groups, former soldiers or young Israeli and Palestinians who meet in places where the Wall is not completed. They understand all the more the devastating impact of this Wall; besides the fact that it annexes Palestinian land (as well as water resources), keeps family members separated, and prevents Palestinian to access schools and hospitals, this Wall, once completed, will make meetings between Palestinian and Israelis even more unlikely.

These sessions about Palestine give students an opportunity to better understand what the word 'peace' can sometimes mean. When you live in Belgium, this word may seem quite meaningless: something obvious, trivial. But when you talk about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and that you understand how complex it is, you understand that peace is much, much more than that. A Palestinian friend was telling me: 'We have to overcome decades of hatred and incomprehension. We have to work on this all together, Palestinians, Israeli and international, for years. And

" We have to overcome decades of hatred and incomprehension. We have to work on this all together, Palestinians, Israeli and international, for years. And maybe we will succeed one day"

maybe we will succeed one day." This day looks more distant than ever, and yet, we must go on working to this aim. And by visiting schools, I hope to help youths to better understand this conflict, to develop a critical opinion, to wish to know more and- who knows?- to take action. It is not necessary to express my opinion for students to have the measure of some injustices and to understand that by fighting against these injustices, you work for peace.

I was far from expecting that a simple email could lead me to such a journey in Belgian schools. I am impressed and pleased by the interest demonstrated for this subject, from Brussels to small town Chimay, in technical as much as in general schools. So, as long as I'm asked to do it, I will carry on.

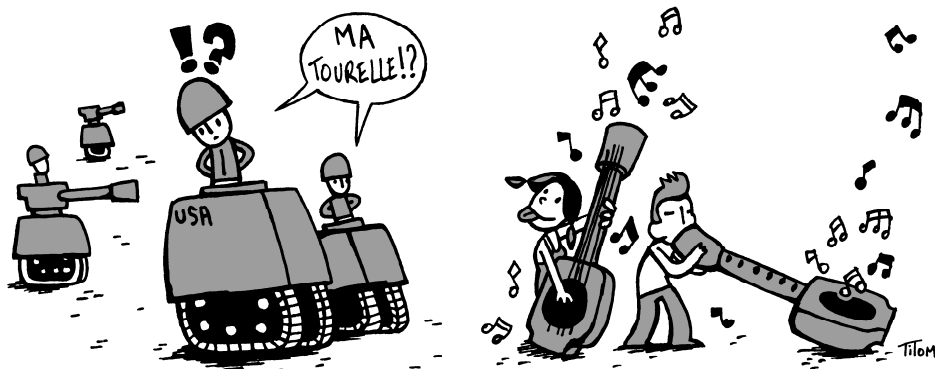


1-5 APRIL 09 STRASBOURG: INTERNATIONAL ACTION CAMP AND COUNTER SUMMIT

On the fourth of April 2009, NATO exists sixty years. Heads of State and Government leaders gather for a big NATO-summit in Strasbourg, France.

Sixty years is more than enough. The European peace movement shows the resistance against NATO through direct non-violent actions, a NATO countersummit and a big demonstration.

Some SCI activists will be present ; if you want to join us, you can get in touch with Marius :
marius.vanhoogstraten@gmail.com



Make Song, Not War!!



www.titom.be