

Letter from Marta

2020 has been a turbulent year for all of us and it's no different for the activists we follow and support in the Balkans. Covid-19 restricted travel and I was unable to visit the activists and groups that I've been working with for 22 years now.

Shortly after the Covid-19 shutdown began in March, Zagreb, the capital of Croatia, experienced its worst earthquake since 1880. It killed one person and injured many, and damaged more than 26,000 buildings at an estimated cost of six billion dollars. Three of our partners' office spaces were damaged. The buildings belong to the city of Zagreb, but it offered no assistance in repairing the damage. The groups cleaned up the debris themselves and shouldered the costs.

North Macedonia (new name, same country) has registered an alarming 1,063 Covid-19 cases a day (47,050 to date) for a country of less than two million people. The public hospitals are full, and it costs over \$17,000 for a bed in a private hospital. People are angry and scared and tired and sick.

Using Covid-19 as an excuse, the Bosnian government opened a refugee tent camp near the Croatian border. It moved thousands of refugees there, knowing it had minimal access to electricity or water or heat. The refugees' movements were highly restricted; the government even forbade public transportation to be used in transporting them. Just as the general population was asked to practice social distancing, thousands were being placed in living conditions where it is impossible to do so.

Meanwhile, the Catholic Church in Bosnia (mostly Croatian nationalists) decided to hold a Mass honoring murderous and fiercely anti-Semitic WWII fascists. The people of Sarajevo responded by lighting the Sarajevo City Hall with an image of the Sarajevo Haggadah, one of the oldest Haggadahs in the world dating back to 1350. The image was a powerful reminder that the people of Sarajevo had saved the Sarajevo Haggadah at least twice, once during WWII and again during the siege of Sarajevo in the 1990s.

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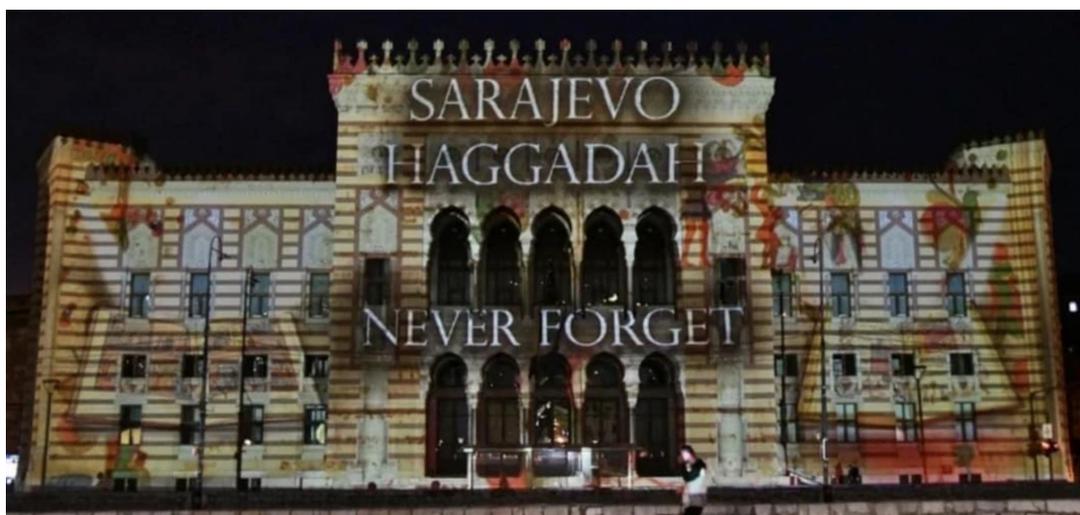
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PO Box 3070
Half Moon Bay,
CA 94019
650.726.3772





Center for Women War Victims

The Center for Women War Victims in Zagreb, Croatia offers a variety of services for women refugees and their families. Here baby refugee Nessim & Pati (the granddaughter of the Center's psychologist) enjoy his new stroller provided by the Center. Nessim and his mother tried to cross the northern border but were caught by the police and sent back after they took all of her belongings and clothing, even diapers for the baby!

The Center's furnace was also destroyed in the earthquake and even though the City of Zagreb owns the apartment, they have refused to help with the repairs. So far, the Center has spent over \$5,000 to make the offices workable and really needs another \$5,000 to continue the repairs.

Centre for Women's Studies



The Centre for Women's Studies offered a workshop this year on the dancing female body.

The Centre reports, "the pandemic in Croatia has brought a new wave of austerity measures and mass layoffs that have hit households, lowering family wages, and further exposing women to violence. Like all major economic crises, this one is accompanied by the strengthening of the clerical extreme right and radical movements which attack reproductive rights, encourage gender violence, promote discrimination and police violence against minority women, (especially Roma women) and foster traditional roles for women. These elevate men as breadwinners and diminish women's economic independence. Domestic violence has increased by 57% compared to last year due to the anti-pandemic measures that keep victims at home with their abusers."

The earthquake in Zagreb damaged the heating system in the Centre's offices and the city does not seem interested in repairing or replacing it. With winter here, this is very disconcerting for the future of classes in the Centre.



Kosovo Women's Network

Kosovo Women's Network believes that in times of global crisis gender inequality is even more amplified and women bear the brunt of the suffering. Here they join the March 8th, International Women's Day, gathering with posters that say "We March, We Do Not Celebrate."

Theatra



In February of 2020 I received an email from Theatra in North Macedonia announcing they were changing their focus. "We noticed these past few years that many young women and teenage girls, are much more willing to make the change we always looked forward to. They just need the necessary skill set. We figured that a large portion of the investment of everything that we do should be pointed towards them. So, starting this May, we plan on opening up a school. We will teach young women and children, drama, music, creative writing, theater, and design. The modules/courses are being prepared at the moment, instructors are ready, then comes the website, and a big launch campaign. They are going to be short and semi long modules, from 6 to 12 weeks, after formal school hours, from 6:00PM – 8:00PM. We also plan a summer school program when the girls have more free time." And then Covid-19 hit.

By summer Theatra was offering roof top classes to children on astronomy (above) and a class on comic book drawing and another on acting. The classes are also offered online for families who don't want to gather in groups. For young women, classes are also offered on human rights, LGBT rights and sexual education which draws a lot of attention!

Counseling for Lesbians



Counseling for Lesbians in Belgrade, Serbia celebrates their grant from Heart & Hand after it was hand carried by a friend from the US! They changed their focus of work from receiving calls to being more pro-active—calling LGBTQ women and asking them how they are doing. Their slogan is SOLIDARITY INCREASES IMMUNITY. They mostly work on healing fear and preventing further traumatization. They also support women who don't go out — especially aging lesbians, disabled women in institutions and those living in small towns. In addition, they assist women who worked in foreign countries and were stranded waiting to come back, and those on the edge of poverty. They learned that women with disabilities were the most adaptable to the rules of confinement, given their long experience in not being able to go out during months of cold and rainy winters.

Special Moms



Coaches and swimmers for the only swim team for children with disabilities in Bosnia/Herzegovina.

The group of Special Moms (mothers of children with disabilities) in Bosnia/Herzegovina continues to be strong and active. I am always moved by the stories within this group and the pure generosity that occurs on their Facebook page when one of them is in trouble and doesn't have heat in the winter or has run out of diapers. Grant funds were used to purchase additional equipment for

the swimmers and trainers on a swim team for children with disabilities. The club does not charge its swimmers monthly fees because many parents were struggling financially just to reach the end of each month. They also offer weekly yoga classes for the Special Moms with childcare provided within the facility, so the moms have a chance for a break and to network with one another. The Special Moms have been pushed even deeper into poverty with Covid as they have mostly been working as housecleaners, but this work is illegal to start with and now many are choosing not to have housecleaners in their homes.

Heart & Hand Partners

Center for Women War Victims

Zagreb, Croatia
www.czzzr.hr/
www.petra-nvo.net/

Centre for Women's Studies

Zagreb, Croatia
<http://zenstud.hr/english/>

Counseling for Lesbians

Belgrade, Serbia
www.facebook.com/LezbejskaSolidarnost/

Crvena

Sarajevo, Bosnia/Herzegovina
www.crvena.ba/

CURE

Sarajevo, Bosnia/Herzegovina
www.fondacijacure.org/

Forgotten Children of War Association

Sarajevo, Bosnia/Herzegovina
www.zdr.org.ba

KONTRA

Zagreb, Croatia
<http://www.kontra.hr>

Kosova Women's Network

Pristina, Kosovo
www.womensnetwork.org/

OKVIR

Sarajevo, Bosnia/Herzegovina
www.okvir.org/

♥sebna MaMa Bosnia/Herzegovina

Seka House
Island of Brac, Croatia

Theatra

Skopje, Macedonia
www.youtube.com/user/TheTheatra

Women in Black

Belgrade, Serbia
zeneucnom.org/index.php?lang=en

Women's Group Brod

Slavonski Brod, Croatia
www.udruga-brod.hr

Protests against the Serbian government's handling of Covid-19 are similar to what we hear in the US. It lifted the lockdown right before a federal election in June. Supporters celebrated with hugs and kisses but not a mask was in sight. Not surprisingly, the infection rate rose rapidly after the election. More than 3,000 doctors sent a letter to the government complaining that they were overwhelmed, lacked basic supplies and were frustrated that infection rates and deaths were routinely underreported. Instead of responding to the doctors' complaints, the government retaliated by subjecting them to disciplinary proceedings and even dismissing some doctors after 34 years of hospital service.

Kosovo's president, Hashim Thaçi, a guerilla leader in the war for independence from Serbia in the late 1990s, has resigned to

face charges for war crimes against humanity in The Hague.

I am hopeful that our election and new President might make a difference in once again setting a model for how a democracy can work, not only for our own benefit in this country, but for all the globe.

I understand that we're all stretched from supporting Covid-19 relief, assorted natural disasters and electoral politics, but I hope you'll join me again in giving generously to the Heart & Hand Fund. Despite facing obstacles of a pandemic, an earthquake, and corrupt governments, our dynamic groups continue working to improve the lives of women in the Balkans. They need and deserve our support.

Thank you,

Marta Drury



Cure

Candidates from five different political parties joined Fondacija CURE / Foundation CURE for a peaceful walk in Zenica, Bosnia/Herzegovina. Together, they talked with town residents about the right for women to make decisions about their bodies, employment, education, health care, tourism, entrepreneurship, environment and women in business.

Through Water to Freedom

Together with more than 100 organizations from around the world, grantee Crvena Association for Culture and Art in Bosnia/Herzegovina expressed solidarity with the UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights to Water and Sanitation. Even though legislation banning small hydro- electric plants was adopted earlier this year, construction continues. The destruction, damming, and diverting of small rivers is devastating to local communities that rely on water for tourism as well as basic needs.

Forgotten Children of War



The Forgotten Children of War hosted their first-ever Live Monuments Peace Camp. The six-day educational program provided participants with the opportunity to expand their knowledge on peacebuilding and build collaborations with experts and survivors.