

Letter from Marta

"We are facing some kind of collapse without the light in the tunnel or hope that something new and emancipating will come after the time of struggle. Pandemics have made us realize, on a larger scale, of how deeply rooted are corrupt political webs. Disguised in well-functioning nationalistic folklore that produces deeper and deeper segregation and enables further exploitation, capitalism now lives its full potential. Simultaneously, the State apparatus uses the state of affairs as a method to close, separate, divide and (mis)use commons in its wider sense. Nobody and nothing is safe, not from the invisible virus, or from decisions from above. Economies are struggling. Planet is destroyed. Poverty strikes. People are on the move. Our geographies have changed, new lines have been drawn across the land and imagination. However, we do not sit in expectation, but rather engage in creative work, long discussions, knowledge and sometimes even despair."

From the Bosnian NGO, Crvena

I first met three activists from the Balkans in 1997—from Kosovo, Croatia and Bosnia/Herzegovina. I was immediately impressed by all three—their great feminist energy and intellect and compassion and generosity, their creative approaches to creating solutions for community change and their determination to cross borders and support their sisters in activism while their fathers, brothers and politicians were shooting one another down, was profound. In 1998 I made a visit to the region and everything I had felt in the initial meetings was confirmed and greatly expanded. I started the Heart & Hand Fund in 1999 in a response to the Serbian government's aggressive behaviors in Kosovo. The New York Times was full of photos of Kosovars off in boxcars to unknown refugee camps with a laptop under one arm and children or pets under the other arm. My friends and eventually people I didn't know, people from around the world, responded generously to my letter with \$200,000—I think partially

100% of every contribution goes directly to fund the work of activists

Thanks to our friends at the Peace Development Fund, you can make an online tax-deductible gift to **Heart and Hand** by using mightycause. You can make a difference to our brave partners in the Balkans by making your gift today.

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Peace Development Fund /Heart & Hand Fund

c/o Marta Drury
PO Box 3070
Half Moon Bay,
CA 94019
650.726.3772



Croatian women's NGOs in Zagreb rallied to support women in Afghanistan. Women in Black also organized rallies in Serbia.

because we realized that this could happen to us. Since then, many of Heart & Hand's donors have given each and every year since 1999. Every dollar has gone to support our grantees.

I haven't been to The Balkans since September of 2019. This has been an unwelcome and uneasy big change in my life. The changes we have seen in our own country in that time have been happening in many places around the world and magnified greatly in the Balkans. I have, of course, stayed in touch with our partners. A few have been stricken with Covid and recovered (I read somewhere that the Balkans have the highest vaccination hesitancy in Europe and perhaps in the world). Some of the hesitancy could be simply access. More than a year into the pandemic, in Bosnia vaccinations were not easily available unless you were willing and comfortable to go to the Serbian part of the country or Serbia itself. In general, it appears that only half of the people are fully vaccinated.

In Croatia, many activists have survived two earthquakes in which their office spaces were totally wrecked. Bosnia is experiencing unemployment over 32%. Domestic violence is up everywhere. Homophobia is rampant. While reports occur every year that Bosnia/ Herzegovina is failing, it seems even more credible these days. The Bosnian Serb leader is threatening to secede the Serbski region of Bosnia/Herzegovina. If that were to happen, what with Serbia's strong links these days to Russian and China, all of Europe might get involved and yet another war may emerge. Croatia, Bosnia/Herzegovina and Serbia have been greatly stretched for years with Iraqi, Syrian and now Afghani refugees. They are not welcome by the governments and are often brutally moved to isolated places where they are subject to landmines if they try to leave these camps that barely have tents with no water or services or toilets or medical aid. Of course, our partners are there to help but, in these days, they are also very stretched with their own missions and caring for their families and staff.

And yet in spite of all this dire news globally and regionally, our partners continue with their work

and seemingly find joy and a determination to keep on working. Many have received international awards.

In my own news, I wrote to our partners over two months ago with word it is time for me to retire. I turn 80 next year. Obviously, this decision is

bittersweet. I love these groups and these women. We have stood side-by-side in the darkest times, not only as political allies, but also as friends. I know that our friendships will continue, and their important work will continue to flourish. I will miss our lively conversations. But I find my own energy greatly diminished these days and without the office help I had before Covid I am feeling very stretched to keep up with everything.

Heart & Hand has been an important source of funding and support. We've been able to do what we do, because of your support. It is our intention to leave each group with two years of funding and hopefully with a bit added in for well-being. I hope you will be able to give one more time to [The Heart & Hand Fund](#). Heart & Hand will be open to taking donations through June of 2022 so if it's easier to give once this year and another gift in 2022 please do so by June of 2022. If you have any questions, please feel free to write or call me. Thank you for supporting and sharing this journey all these many years and thank you for all that you do in your own lives.



Kontra's office in Zagreb, Croatia after the second earthquake hit. This is a volunteer attempting to organize the chaos—she is Serbian seeking refuge in Croatia.

Marta



What a donation from you can do...

Your funding brought us rent - at times when we didn't have any core support and our "office" was the only safe space where we could meet and plan our actions, projects, initiatives; where we could talk and plot small revolutions. Your funding brought pepper sprays at times when LGBT-phobic violence was so high - that our friends couldn't walk down the street without fear. You brought us funds that we could use without restriction and support LGBTIQ+ persons who have been kicked out from their homes or have migrated to Sarajevo without anyone else to turn to. It was with your support that we organized stencil workshops, creative writing workshops, organized exhibitions... We were able to collect stories from the war, from the pioneering women and LGBTIQ+ persons who stood on the front lines and working with women... Everything that "classic" donors couldn't understand was part of the struggle - you supported. Now - times have changed and they've started supporting "arts and culture" or seeing that peer counseling is not service provision - but community empowerment and building. But you supported us throughout this time - warmly, kindly, lovingly - and based on trust... I remember when we sent you the T-shirts from our exhibition and it was soaked with smoke as it was part of our community calendar exhibition! Well - guess what - most of us quit smoking or we are vaping, and we hate smoke now! Your generosity and warmth, genuine empathy, both yours and Kerry's, is something I will keep in my heart forever. You both touched many of our hearts...

- Queer activists in Bosnia/Herzegovina



Seka House



A volunteer at Seka House having fun while painting at the annual clean up.

Seka House is a magical retreat center on a hill above the Adriatic Sea in Croatia. Regardless of Covid restrictions, Seka House on the island Brac in Croatia served as a much-needed R&R space for women survivors and activists from the Balkans. Although women from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia need to travel long hours to reach the island Brac, they were very excited to come to the sea for the recovery of their wellbeing and exchange with

other women from the region in safe and supportive surroundings. A total of 11 groups, 107 women and children stayed at the house in 2021. Seka was a place of meeting and exchange of survivors of domestic violence, sexual violence, war violence, feminist activists from four countries (Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia, Iraq). Also, at least twice a year a group of lesbians come for a week or two and do needed maintenance, repair, gardening and deep cleaning while going to the beach in the afternoons!



Syrian refugee kids getting ready for their first visit to the beach!

Center for Women War Victims

The Center for Women War Victims continues to support sexual assault survivors who experienced violence in wartime to find the strength to speak up after almost 30 years of living in silence. With the Center's support, women ask for the status made possible by a 2015 Law that provides survivors with a one-time payout of (\$15,450 US), regular monthly compensation (\$380 US), medical assistance, health support. These women need all our psychological, practical, emotional and legal support to overcome stigma and shame. Only then do they feel comfortable to pursue their legal rights.

"One of the women who applied for the status in 2015 was rejected by the Committee for Victims of war related sexual violence. She turned to the Center for help and we used all possible legal ways to appeal to the Administrative Court and High Administrative Court, bringing additional forensic psychiatric evaluation of her psychological condition and consequences, and new evidence and witnesses. In September 2021 the High Administrative Court in Croatia, after five years of this legal battle decided in favor of the survivor. It was very emotional for all of us in the office that a woman survivor finally got justice after waiting three decades."



A press conference in the offices of the Centre for Women's Studies where they presented their research about sexual harassment and bullying in workplaces in Croatia and its prevalence. The press conference was attended by the Gender Equality Ombudsperson among others.

Centre for Women's Studies

The Centre is the first non-institutional educational group in Croatia founded in 1995 by a group of feminists, scholars, peace activists and artists. I think I started sending feminist books in 1996 when we could still mail internationally at book rate! A friend had visited them and said I would like them. In 1997, I attended a meeting of international feminist activists in a monastery in Switzerland and imagine my surprise when I introduced myself, a woman came from the other side of the circle and leapt into my lap and said thank you thank you for the gorgeous books you've been sending us! I think that was the beginning of The Heart & Hand Fund. Over 700 people have gone through the program and a few of its graduates have gone into public office—others have become professors, teachers and activists, sharing their finely-honed vision into classrooms and the streets. This year The Centre had over 40 lecturers and activists and artists (regional and international) guiding 37 students in examining daily life through the lens of feminism. Students are encouraged to be creative in their final presentation— not only by the writing of an academic paper but also through panels, art exhibitions and short films.

SPECIAL MOMS

Due to the pandemic, the yoga class organized for the Special moms of children with disabilities has switched to being online and offered a way for mothers who don't live in Sarajevo to participate—that is IF they have access to a computer and WIFI. The group also uses part of the grant to support the swimming club for kids with special needs and to ensure that the girls in the club have female trainers with extra training.



Packages are delivered for Special Moms at Sarajevo General Hospital.

They have delivered Solidarity packages to the Sarajevo General Hospital for mothers who are there for their kids' surgeries. No visitors are allowed these days and parcels may be only dropped off once a day during a small window of time. If the mothers have no one in Sarajevo, they can feel even more isolated and lonely and the parcels are full of treats and practical items to let them know they are not alone.

CURE

In 2003, three young women, two of them maybe still teens themselves, met my partner and me at a cafe and told us of a plan they had to start an NGO that made connections between art and activism and young women across the country. They were very excited to share their dreams with us and we were thrilled to say Yes! I think we had \$500 in cash on us and gave them that which they promptly used to register their new organization of CURE with the government. On our return to the US, we sent them their first grant and within a year they were conducting seminars in high schools across Bosnia/Herzegovina. They included boys and girls together and then safer spaces for girls alone. It was a brilliant concept and once a year they brought teen girls to Sarajevo for arts festivals and opportunities to network with other young women. In 2021, CURE held their 16th PitchWise, a festival of women art and activism. Over 300 people participated and 50 activists and artists presented. They believe that every experience of discrimination and violence is different and the way we react is different, but the system that tolerates discrimination and violence is the same. The central theme this year was WE ARE NOT ALONE!

The director of CURE is Jadranka Miličević whom I met in my first visit to Sarajevo in 1998. In 2017 she was chosen as a Sakharov fellow and there is an interesting [photo report](#) on Jadranka and her work in the region that highlights many of the challenges of being a woman in this region even today.



Proud Activists of CURE Foundation celebrating 15 years of PitchWise, an annual festival bridging arts and activism.



CURE marked International Day of Fight Against Violence Against Women Street Action "Red Shoes for Women Victims of Femicide" with 40 pairs of representing the number of women killed in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the last six years.

Okvir

The two active leaders of Okvir, in Sarajevo, Bosnia/Herzegovina, while finishing their own advanced degrees in psychology and psychotherapy, have conducted 48 online and in-person peer counseling sessions and have also made therapy referrals to LGBTIQ friendly psychotherapists. They keep their website current with articles on mental health regarding anxiety, depression and coming out.

Okvir continues their work around the Queer Archive activities. They've established a volunteer system, written three articles and an essay on the Queer Archive for the portal [lgbti.ba](#), Digital New Deal and [kvirarhiv.org](#). They are connected virtually with other queer archives to exchange positive practices.

CRVENA



This is the first of six walks through the city of Sarajevo looking at good and not-so-good practices of public spaces and urban living. This four-hour walk focused on the sounds of a city and how that shapes the identity of the city and the people that live in it.

Like most organizations that we fund, CRVENA while being challenged by the Covid-19 pandemic, did not stop, and continued on developing their programs, from research to education, production and collaboration. They have put a significant effort in developing new forms of knowledge transfer and production, as well as art productions tackling issues from patriarchal myths and historical violence, exploitation of people, lands and commons to women's authorship and feminist response. They have also continued the ongoing struggle for water and rivers, public spaces and parks and a right to decide and how to make these spaces safe for all.

They have always sought to frame their work with a very defined politic. They wrote, "How can one be political and emancipated, while taking new work in the name of love? For women, it became evidently impossible. The idea of work certainly has new meaning and new purpose; to produce always so the machine can run. Again, we have transformed from workers to workers and caregivers, teachers, cleaners, whose bodies have been exploited at work and at home. Seems like the present teaches us that struggles won in the past can easily appear as the new front, on which soldiers on our side are too tired to fight. The overall rise in cases of violence against women during the pandemic might indicate several things; that more and more men feel frustration and act violently towards "the weaker sex" or that our cage became so small that we have to eliminate some. Assumptions aside, we have faced the over exhaustion and over exploitation. We might let go if we do not ignite."



Kosovo Women's Network

Heart & Hand Fund has been partnered with the Network since its beginning. It now has 180 member groups and is a prominent voice in the country for protecting and promoting the rights of women and girls. This year through their Kosovo Women's Fund, the Network has been able to make almost \$270,000 in micro grants to 34 organizations needing core support as well as support for their advocacy initiatives. In 2021, KWN has continued its work to address gender-based violence: conducting evidence-based research on social service availability, providing legal aid for persons who have suffered violence, monitoring courts, and advising the government on new legislation. KWN supported 25 women with free legal advice, referral, and representation in various institutions. "If you had not helped, talked and advised me whenever I needed, I would have given up and gone back to my husband," said a 35-year-old woman from Drenas who had suffered domestic violence, and received free legal aid from KWN. "Many people are pressuring me, but KWN is my hope and my strength," she said.

This fall, KWN members mobilized online and door-to-door campaigns, calling on citizens to Vote for More Women, which KWN believes contributed to more women being elected in recent municipal elections.

**Center for Women
War Victims**

Zagreb, Croatia
www.czzr.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/

P♥sebna MaMa

Bosnia/Herzegovina

Seka House

Island of Brac, Croatia

Theatra

Skopje, Macedonia

Women in Black

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

Women's Group Brod

Slavonski Brod, Croatia
www.udruga-brod.hr

Women in Black

Women in Black continues with their public demonstrations, reminding Serbians of their role in the past in the long-term effects of violence of wars committed in the name of Serbian people that didn't always agree with this approach. They work, often at personal or organizational risk, (in October the front door of their offices was spray-painted with "Whores in Black" and "Only Unity saves the Serbs"). They continue to support women survivors and their families, especially in

Bosnia/Herzegovina and Croatia, deal with the ongoing effects of publicly coming out as survivors of the trauma of rape during war times and testifying to how that has impacted their lives for nearly 30 years. As you can imagine,



A silent appearance in Belgrade, Serbia commemorating the massacre at Srebrenica joined by citizens who agree with Women in Black that this genocide was not done with their permission.

this infuriates the current political leaders of all the countries in that they prefer to think of these men as national heroes and the violence they created as myths or necessary clean ups. They stay focused and strong by organizing networking meetings with 89 activists from Bosnia/ Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Montenegro and Serbia as well as guests from Germany, the Netherlands and Austria. This year they were able to send 11 women survivors and activists for a well-needed vacation to Seka House on the island Brac, Croatia for over two weeks!



Graffiti on the front door of the offices of Women in Black in Belgrade...it says Whores in Black and the symbol of Serbian nationalist (written 5 times) and the name of Ratko Mladic, Serbian war criminal or hero, depending on your perspective, found guilty at The Hague.