

Open Letter to the International Community: Call for Solidarity

Open letter from Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina

During the last few months we have been seeing images that might as well have been taken at the beginning of 90's – images of women, children and men fleeing from death and destruction, in search of a safe haven. During the 90's it was the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina and other countries of the former SFRY, 4 million of us, seeking safe shelter from war within our countries, across Europe and the world. Today we are witnessing millions of people being forced to leave their homes to save their lives, the most basic human right. We must not be blind, silent and inactive.

Just in Syria more than 4 millions people have been forced to leave their country, and these are only UNHCR registered refugees in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, and North Africa. Only small portions of them have undertaken a life and death journey in order to reach, what is assumed to be, a safer ground in Europe. The difference between the 90's and today is that the refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina and other parts of former SFRY, seeking shelter, were not facing death and persecution once they've managed to leave their war-shattered countries. Sadly, that is not the case for Syrians that keep dying even in countries as remote from Syria as Austria is, or in the deadly Mediterranean Sea.

The death of women, children and men, seeking refuge is as devastating and meaningless as the deaths of thousands of civilians dying in and around Syria – in Aleppo, Douma, Zabadani, Homs, Ar Raqqa. In Syria they are dying from barrel bombs and other war-related horrors, in Europe from lack of solidarity and safe passages. Instead of empathy, food, shelter and a promise of a better future, they are met by militaristic response, barbed wire, tear gas, and police and military brutality.

Refugees are protected by the international refugee law. Each country in the region, and the countries of European Union, as signatories to Geneva Conventions are obliged to provide protection and shelter to those in need. In an attempt to switch the discourse the media and governments of Europe are talking about 'migrant crisis', but we know, from our own experience, that this is not a 'crisis of migrants' but rather crisis of (in)humanity towards by war and violence displaced individuals and families. Financial calculations of the European countries of how much it is worth spending on saving a human life are toppled with xenophobia and racism.

Instead of allowing media and the governments to criminalize and problematize people in need, turning them into illegal migrants and calling them a security risk for the countries they reach, we need to remind ourselves what is the real issue here. The real issue is the ongoing war in Syria and wars and violence in the Middle East and Africa, that bring endless suffering to the people and for which we bear a significant degree of responsibility for – let us not forget that one of the reasons for wars and violence taking place in many of these countries is the global exploitation of resources and power struggles, which European colonizers created and today's Western powers and corporations help to maintain. The real issue here is the inability (or unwillingness) to stop the

war and violence. The problem is not the people who are seeking shelter, protection and a better future!

As people of Bosnia and Herzegovina, with our own experiences of death, destruction, and despair, we are deeply touched by the faith of the Syrian people, and others coming to Europe risking their lives, and deeply ashamed of the actions taken by the regional governments and EU. We are angered by the impotency of the international community to respond to the outcries of the Syrians and others to stop the war, to stop barrel bombs, to stop the killings, to mediate peace.

While the Western nations now have turned their focus to 'resolving the migration crisis', we the peace activists from Bosnia and Herzegovina, call upon our government to open our borders for free movement of refugees and/or migrants, and to grant asylum for those who chose to stay. We call upon our fellow citizens to show humanity, solidarity and empathy with them while resident in our country.

We also call upon the international community to:

1. Stop the war in Syria, as the top priority in resolving "the crisis"; stop the wars in each country including countries in the Middle East (such as Palestine, Afghanistan, Iraq, Yemen and Libya) and Africa (Eritrea, Sudan, Somalia, DRC etc); to stop the global militarization.
2. While mediating the peace demand unconditional cease fire and guarantee unconditional and complete access to humanitarian aid for the people in Syria and other countries affected by violence;
3. Open the borders and live up to the international legal obligations to protect those seeking asylum across Europe; helping refugees cannot stop simply at provision of safe haven, we must also ensure that the refugees can travel and move freely and legally to safe territories in order to access the rights they are entitled to – international protection, asylum and integration - wherever it is possible for them to obtain it;
4. Ensure full and indiscriminatory access to justice for the civilian victims of war.

IN SOLIDARITY,

[Initiative WOMEN ORGANIZING FOR CHANGE](#)