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SOLIDARITY IS OUR STRENGTH!

We continue to write short reports. We have not stopped visiting "Afghani Park", and refugee camps when given permission. Following the demolition of the barracks, however, (note the date) we were distraught, we could not find the words to explain the depth of the violence that took place.

May 7th, 2017

Volunteers from "Solidarity-Bosnia" came to Belgrade to visit the refugees in the barracks. Throughout April, they collected aid in the Western Bosnian city of Bihać. The action was called "Aid for Refugees in Belgrade", and today was their fifth visit to Belgrade. Volunteers from "Solidarity-Bosnia" experienced a lot of challenges when entering Serbia, and the same challenges were repeated on their return trip. Border police in Serbia conducted a detailed inspection of vehicles, luggage, verifying the "goals and activities" of this humanitarian organization from Bihać.

Women in Black (WiB) activists along with NORAS (Mirko Medenica, Miša Virijević, Ljiljana Čantrak, Staša Zajović), alongside the assistance of Asif Bahar and numerous refugees, waited for the human people and organized the distribution for these very important items: food, hygienic products, clothing, shoes... the event was moving. Our action lasted almost all day. It was raining, there were hundreds of refugees with us, and we organized a fair distribution.

That day, we learned that an extensive campaign of the Commissariat for Refugees was launched, with the goal of displacing all refugees from the city and deporting them to some of the camps.

Ljiljana Čantrak, NORAS 381

May, following the demolition of the barracks...

After the shameful and brutal deportation of refugees from Belgrade, I was in a difficult emotional situation. I tried to find all the wonderful people I spent many moments with, I called them, I sought them out. They sent, via Facebook, photos from the campsites. They showed terrible and extremely inhumane conditions of their accommodation in these camps. I have saved the pictures, so I could have on record documentation of the extremely inhuman treatment of refugees. Immediately I realized that our comrades are very afraid, mostly silenced, and do not want to talk through social connections about the poor treatment and behaviour at the hands of the Serbian authorities. They were subject to severe threats regarding possible exits from the camp to the city.



A pamphlet stated that "any exit outside of the camp will be sanctioned by deportation to a camp in Preševo", a refugee camp in the far south of Serbia.

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In the first days after the demolition of the barracks, all the camps were closed, both for refugees, for the media and for NGOs. In a couple of contacts with our friends, they said it was very bad, they were closed, they did not get any help...

We also learned about reprisals. Two of the refugees who volunteered in Miksalište and Info Park were fired and warned because they were talking about deportation on social networks and because they set up pictures of the demolition of barracks in Belgrade.

Today I stayed in the Afghani Park with Miša, and to my great satisfaction I saw a lot of people who have simply escaped from the camps, and a few boys who I recognized that are hiding around the city.

They reiterated that the conditions in the camps are terrible: they get only one meal per day (around 8 in the morning) and the meal contains half of a loaf of bread, but more often than not only two pieces of bread, some canned food, no tea, no hygienic products, the bathrooms are broken, toilets are filled with faeces, mattresses where they sleep have no bedding, there is no access to medical care, and there are many sick people there... Refugees are left to fend for themselves; trapped and isolated.

I met a couple of men who were deported from Croatia. In the last couple of days, a large number of our friends have not managed to cross the border. A large number of refugees are trying to find respite and are close to the Croatian border.

Ljiljana Čantrak, NORAS 381

May, following the demolition of the barracks...

Despite the severe ban and threats of deportation to a camp in Preševo, the park is full every single day with our friends who do not agree to the ban on leaving the camps.

In the past few days, almost everyone was cautious and suspicious, they did not want to talk to us, and all because they were punished if they were to anyone, or shared the truth about the terrible conditions in the camps. Everyone proclaims that "the barracks were a wonderful place to live," that they missed them very much and that they were very happy there... But now, people in the camps are deprived of the freedom of movement, and they are at risk of punishment or subjection to verbal maltreatment and humiliation. Even the "Doctors Without Borders" (MSF) and "Doctors of the World" are denied access to camps in Krnjača and Obrenovac. In this camp the situation is worse than in Krnjača: up to twenty young people are accommodated in the rooms, beds are without linens, people receive only one blanket despite that they say that they are very cold at night, showers are locked, they perform hygiene in stinking



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and overflowing sinks, and they do not have access to hygienic means. In this camp there are increasingly frequent conflicts between the migrants, due to the built up pressures and poor living conditions, and due to the fear, threats, and the desperation situation they face.

Regarding the tortures that refugees experience near the Croatian border or when crossing no one even writes about; it's not news.

As we sat and interacted with Spanish volunteers, people from the Commissariat for Refugees marched through the park. They were angry, nervous, irate, and they made our friends scatter, even if one accidentally stepped on a grassy surface.

We brought plenty of help though we split up rather quickly. Part of the aid was for women and children, for our friends who were taken to the camp in Šid. Today we learned that this camp was demolished and that migrants would be deported to campsites in Croatia (Berkasovo and Principovač).

Tomorrow we will visit the park again. We bought hygienic supplies and some sweets on Wednesday. Many told us that during the holy days of Ramadan, they really miss their families.

Ljiljana Čantrak, NORAS 381



JUNE 2017

June 2nd

I went to the Afghani Park with Miša, where we found ourselves with the folks, our friends, who, wanting to be in downtown Belgrade, come to the park on a daily basis. It was a warm afternoon, nothing hinted at the chaos that would happen so suddenly, violently, without any indication, of course without any cause. We were standing beside our companions, they were sitting, chatting, laughing... Suddenly I saw a policeman who was kicking a child in the head and body. Miša and I immediately responded, we started separating the angry policeman, separating our friends with our hands, calming them down. We went towards the rampaged policeman because some women reported the policeman, but this was only more reason for him to go all out on the refugees. We did not allow that policeman to spiral into his own madness or to get to our friends... there were more and more of our friends around us, everyone surrounded us, everyone in shock, us as well as the foreign volunteers.

Thanks to the refugee's resilience, and mine and Miša's persistence, after the arrival of the intervention team, the conflict ended. A little later, that policeman came back, approached Miša and myself, spoke calmly to us, and the two of us in a diplomatic manner managed to calm him down. A little later, a young man approached me, removed a silver chain from his neck and gave it to me – a gift from his heart. I kissed him, and I did not cry.

Ljiljana Čantrak NORAS 381

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June 3rd

Miša and I visit Afghani Park daily. More and more refugees come from Obrenovac and Krnjača camps every day, even coming from Bogovoda, which is 70 km from Belgrade. We see our old friends from the barracks, but there are more and more new ones. Many deportees from Croatia, or from Germany, or those who somehow managed to cross the Bulgarian border. Today we led a boy to Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) because of a serious infection on his finger. We are preparing to visit the camp in Krnjača.

June 7th – Visit to Krnjača Camp

Upon the request of NORAS 381, the Commissariat gave us permission to enter the camp. Miša, Violeta (WiB) and myself entered the camp, and we met our friends from the barracks and from the park. They were waving to us out of the window, they were very worn out. Aid (most clothing for children and women, sweets, hygiene items...) that we brought in to the barracks, where our friend Subhan Khan waited for us. We spent the whole camp in the afternoon. When we started home, our old and new friends accompanied us, they took us to the bus station and with them was a woman with a six-month baby born in Serbia.

And finally, the camp manager told us that "it would be nice if our help/donations would be so helpful if what was distributed could go to at least half of the total number of migrants." And that's over 1000 people! What does the state do with the massive donations it receives in the name of refugees?

Ljiljana Čantrak, NORAS 381

June 12th

I did not submit reports regularly. I was in a distraught condition, after the demolition of barracks in Belgrade and the deportation of refugees to camps throughout Serbia. I was shocked when I received the information about the latest event in the camp in Obrenovac. On Saturday June 3rd at 5 in the morning, police rushed into the camp and turned to those sleeping in refugee camps. With the use of force and brutality, random people were pulled out of bed and the police made them board three buses. They were to be taken to a camp in Preševo (the camp in Preševo is actually a closed camp, more like a prison, and serves as a threat with the warning that someone who is not good will be punished and deported to Preševo).

Confused, frightened, and surprised – although refugees are accustomed to all of this, they asked what was happening, why and where they were being taken because they had the required papers to stay in that camp. The police only said: "Go, go .." and without any explanation, refugees were beaten and injured. The person who informed me about everything sent me pictures of injured young men, about the brutal deportation of our friends in Preševo. Today I informed many activists In Croatia, Slovenia and Macedonia and Bosnia.

Ljiljana Čantrak, NORAS 381



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June 13th – Cleaning the grass after the refugees

Mirko and Ljilja bought the basic hygiene products and we went with Staša to the Afghani Park. We spent a couple of hours in socializing and chatting with our friends. Almost everyone from Afghanistan all repeated the same reasons for escape: persecution by the Taliban, the war...

In the park we found international volunteers: Ana from Switzerland, Isabel from Bilbao (Spain), others from Germany.

Suddenly, two men from the Commissariat for Refugees appeared, and they threw out the young men who were taking shade from the heat of Belgrade under the trees. In accordance with the decree on which "it is strictly forbidden to sit on the grass..." These are not grassy surfaces, rather, it is dirt with patches of grass... Staša spoke with them, demanding an explanation because I will not communicate with them.

Refugees from the camp in Obrenovac testified about the recent deportation: "We slept in the forest, near the camp, for fear of them picking us up and deporting us to Preševo at night... Several buses full of refugees were taken to Preševo..."

We stayed on the benches to talk to the refugees. They talked about the beatings of young men who tried to enter Croatia from Serbia. They were beaten by the Croatian police, so brutally, that many had fractured fingers and hands. After being beaten, they were all returned to Serbia.



Ljiljana Čantrak NORAS 381 and Staša, WiB

June 15th

Today, on June 15th, Staša and Mina brought hygiene packs and sweets to Afghani Park. We decided that on June 20th, World Refugee Day, we would visit our friends who are staying in Obrenovac camp.

We learned that a large number of refugees cannot stay in some of the camps, which is why they seek shelter at the night in the part of Belgrade that is best left unknown. From some of the men, I learned that they were frequently visited by the police, questioned and checked, but not maltreated.

Today, I saw a couple of young men in Afghani Park who just arrived in Belgrade. In the last ten days, a lot of our friends, whom I personally know, managed to cross the borders and enter the EU, into Austria or Italy. Unfortunately, a greater number of them are returning from the border, mostly all beaten and looted.



Ljiljana Čantrak, NORAS 381

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June 16th – Solidarity with Lee from China

Sweet Lee, a Chinese businessman who owns a store near the park, gave me a discount on the goods I bought (underwear, socks...) from the donations that the WiB collected, while they were at a seminar in Sandžak. I took and a few Kg of rice to the park and quickly distributed everything. It was a big crowd, a lot of our friends. Again, they are from the Commissariat, as angry as if they were just released from their chains, alongside cries and unreasonably and vulgar words, kicked out and frightened people who were sitting quietly on the dirt where the grass once was. I recorded their brutal action, but we were all calm.

June 18th

Today, Sunday June 18th, I went to the Afghani Park to see my friends. They reiterated that, in fear of the brutal deportation for Preševo, they sleep in the forest. They have nothing to protect themselves from cold nights. We need to collect warm goods for them...

Today I spoke with a refugee from Afghanistan. He told me that he had left his country more than a year ago, that he was in Germany, from where he was deported to Bulgaria, and that he had fled to Serbia a month ago. This time he stayed in Obrenovac camp. Today he will attempt to cross the border, to go with his five friends, on foot, since they have no money to pay for the smugglers to help them cross... He hopes this time will be able to reach Zagreb, adding that his desired destination is France. I wish them all luck...

Ljiljana Čantrak, NORAS 381



June 20th – Obrenovac, Closed Camp...

The Commissariat for Refugees ignored WiB's request to enter Obrenovac Camp was ignored. Nevertheless, we went to Obrenovac on the World Refugee Day, which the institutions "celebrate" so pompously. We made a lot of packages, collected a lot of clothes. We hoped that we would be able to get into the area of the camp, but they did not permit us entry. However, they allowed us to distribute packages in the parking lot, away from the entrance to the closed camp.

We were persistent, explaining our visit and intent, we did not confront, we were concerned about sharing aid. We were helped by refugees in doing this. A dozen of them came and took in aid on several occasions.

We are told that there are nearly 1000 people staying in the camp, that "we do not have enough for everyone and that there will be a confusion. We were also told that "we should not harass refugees at lunch time, since everyone who lives here receives regular meals, clothes, can freely enter or leave the camp, and have access to a shop," as well as that "everyone takes care of them when they cross the street – they take strict



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care of their safety...“ One of the guards reassured and reiterated that refugees “do not have any freedom anywhere else like they do in our country...“ To the extent that is true, we know, but regarding how “caring” they are, we personally saw this in ourselves. And the “well-being” in the camp was witnessed by frightened, decapitated apartments left in a hopeless state... Sufficient proof of this “well-being” is the fact that no one can enter the camps, none of the media has permission to do any kind of news. Permission to visit one of the camps is granted by one sole person...

Camp visitors were Mirko, Zorica, Staša (WiB) and Ljiljana (NORAS 381)

June 22nd – From Afghani Park to Switzerland

Ljiljana, Milena, Mina, and Staša... This afternoon we visited Afghani Park. While distributing humanitarian aid (hygienic wipes, biscuits, clothing donations...), we met some underage young people who recently arrived from Afghanistan through Bulgaria. They have been placed in Krnjnača camp (20 km from Belgrade). One of them was a 17-year-old, who told us that he came with two other underage boys who were 10 and 13-years old. They stayed in the camp, and in the coming days, they too will come to the park. This is a space for meeting, exchanging information, possibilities... We met friends who we knew from before. We discussed holding a “Hate Free Zone” action in Afghani Park – an action that we’ve been marking for several years in a row every June 27th, which is World Pride Day. For us this is the day of solidarity with refugees.

Using What’s App, we called our friend Asif, who left Serbia on May 25th. Asif spent almost a year in the barracks and in the park. He left Serbia on the symbolic Day of Youth (as it was during the times of Yugoslavia). This was the day we used to celebrate the boldness and joy of Yugoslavian youth, and as if the celebrations for that day continued, we found out that Asif has made it to Switzerland and is working on obtaining his papers. His friends spoke to him in Pashto, and we even spoke a few words to him in Pashto, since he was our language teacher, though we also spoke in English and sometimes Serbian. At the end of the call, everyone told Asif “Inshallah!” Us three (Milena, Mina, Staša) had to go.

Reported by Staša

Ljiljana stayed in the park with the refugees: “The majority of those in the park are those who spend their days there since they cannot get into the camps throughout Serbia, and they’re denied access because they have been told that they have to leave the country. They literally live outdoors, either on the street or in the parks. The police are around them non-stop and they kick them out of those spaces in brutal ways, prohibiting them from staying in the park. Some youth told us that they have not slept for three days because the police are constantly around, pushing them away from where they’re sleeping, over and over on rotation just so they can disturb them. The young men simply do not know what to do. I directed them to the UNHCR, but all of them were adamant and vocal about the fact that NO BODY wanted to help them.

Today I again witnessed a bad scene at the hands of the Commissariat. They appeared in the park from a few different directions, since every day they change their tactics. First I heard some unbearable, inhumane yelling, then noticed that they were advancing towards people who were on non-grassy parts of the park. They approached them aggressively, and they physically tossed them out of those spaces. I began taking pictures with my phone, and suddenly, suddenly I heard someone calling to me and swearing at me, threatening me for photographing those from the Commissariat. I replied in the same manner, but without the swear words. He got up and left the park. Then the unscrupulous ones from the Commissariat moved to the bench beside me, I ignored them...

Ljiljana Čantrak, NORAS 381