

solidarnost je naša snaga

Solidarity with war refugees

THE REPORT ON THE VISIT TO REFUGEES IN BELGRADE

December 18th 2016

On Sunday December 18th 2016, Belgrade was again accompanied by a group of activists of the organization "Solidarity Bosnia" from Bihac, visited Belgrade again and brought the aid that they have collected. We were asked again to help them during the distribution of aid. We were at the abandoned warehouses behind the bus station. At that time activists of "Hot Food Idomeni" were distributing hot meals, like they do every day. From them we heard that at least judging by the number of meals they distributed, the number of refugees decreased and that there are now about 500 in abandoned warehouses.

That day the temperature was below zero. We saw that a large number of refugees is still inadequately dressed for such weather conditions. They miss warm clothes, shoes, a large number of refugees in the absence of jackets carries blankets.

We postponed the distribution of aid after the completion of the hot meals distribution, because from past experience we know that it could lead to chaos and that could jeopardize the safety of refugees. In the meantime, we visited the warehouses. The situation is unchanged. The conditions are below any level. Because of the cold, more fires are burning, around which the refugees are heating them self. For this reason, the amount of smoke in warehouses is so big that it is hardly visible inside, it is difficult to breathe and painful for the eyes. The refugees we spoke to, complained on terrible conditions and that nobody helps them. To our question, whether ultimately they considered the option to go to one of the official centers for refugees, they resolutely refused such a possibility, because they know that from the centers they may be illegally deported to Macedonia or Bulgaria. The fear of illegal deportation is stronger than hunger and cold.

One young man from Afghanistan told us that the police took him out of the refugee center in Presevo and drove him to the border with Macedonia and that he was ordered to cross to the Macedonian side. Soon he was caught by the Macedonian border patrol, who ordered him to return to Serbia. The whole day he spent in the woods, along the border, waiting for night to cross back to Serbia, which he managed. Frightened by what had happened to him, he didn't want to use public transport and main roads, so he walked to Belgrade, about 400 kilometers, it took him eight days to arrive.



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When we started with the distribution of aid, first we shared food packages. We distributed 200 packages, but in the end the distribution was no longer possible, we lost the control of the situation, because due to the appalling conditions in which they are located, a large number of refugees are very anxious and the order is lost very quickly and distribution of aid becomes dangerous and impossible. We decided to temporarily move away, because the tensions were high, and we noticed the police, who watched us and we did not want to give them a reason to use force against refugees. After half an hour we returned, previously we were talking with the refugees to calm the situation and arrange to re-establish order and to make a line. We continued with distribution of clothes. In the beginning, everything worked out very well, but after a few minutes again we lost control and again we had to pull back. Luckily we managed to distribute majority of aid. The rest we gave to refugees we met in the surrounding streets.

For all of us this was a very traumatic experience, because we have the best intentions to help the refugees, but we exposed them to danger, that of mutual conflict, and of the danger that the police can intervene. Refugees were apologizing to us because they could not keep order, and we were comforted them, we told them that they have no reason to apologize, it's not their fault and that we understand them.

These events are just another confirmation of the terrible living conditions in which refugees living. Help is urgently needed.

Written by: Mirko

