

solidarnost je naša snaga

Solidarity with war refugees

February 25, 2017

Violeta (WiB) brought the clothes gathered by Dunja, Suada and Olga. The clothes were carefully chosen and folded, we will give it away to mothers with babies, girls as well as boys and men. I was very touched while going through that clothing, I divided it by their type. I am delightful every time such a present arrives because that shows someone's humanity and that he invested all his emotions into folding that stuff knowing that the package will mean a lot to someone, that they will receive something really nice which they lack and that at that moment will feel themselves loved.

After that I went to the warehouse/hangar, Violeta brought a full bag of sweets and together with Mirko (WiB) went to the barracks. Whenever the guys see us crossing the ramp and heading towards the barracks we can see broad smiles on their faces and they can't wait to meet us and talk to us. They ask us how we are, if we have any shoes and trousers for them, some of them show us their light jackets and asking for something warmer... We immediately distributed lots of thermal socks and shoes. Amongst them were some of our old acquaintances. I apologized to them for not coming day earlier. They helped me climb up the improvised stairs. I went inside the barrack and each one of them had a question for me... We made a plan: one guy was to be the "manager" who was to distribute the stuff and this way help us with giving out everything we bring.

I never forgot anything any refugee ever asked me for. I used to write down numbers and make a list, now my obligation is to remember their faces, names and not to forget what I promised. I cannot afford myself to forget because the refugees are practically imprisoned in Belgrade...

It was a beautiful Friday today, around 18 degrees Celsius and as we expected the "Afghan Park" was brought to life again. I spent my day today in sorting clothes out in the warehouse in order to get things done more efficiently.

Ljiljana Čantrak, NORAS 381

February 26, 2017

Today I took a lot of stuff to the barracks. Next time they will make a list with names and sizes so that as many people could get necessary stuff. We talked and more and more young people approached us asking about our work, they were thankful and told us how much this means to them. They were asking for tents and scissors. Young man who is a hairdresser by profession told us that the scissors Staša bought them cannot be used anymore because they were being used every day.

We need to get them things that are very necessary like hygiene kits, wire for drying clothes, clothespins and of course clothing... There's a graffiti on a wall that says "We need clothes". Outside the barracks I came across several young men who were kicking a rock instead of a football... Men were approaching me asking for pants, jackets, they said they have nothing and they need to replace the clothes they're wearing which are dirty and ripped.

One refugee told me that people in Belgrade don't want to see them, that they smell unpleasantly because they are "dirty". I told them that they're not dirty, that they live under tough conditions and that they can't keep up their hygiene because of this.

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A boy approached me at the ramp. He apologized for not speaking English well and told me his name was Farman, that he was from Afghanistan and that he wasn't sure whether he was 15 or 16. He told me he couldn't pass the Hungarian border, that his shoes were big and uncomfortable and that he had problem with his feet. He asked me if I could get his size shoes and if I have any spare clothes.

I promised him I would try to find something although it is very hard to get anything but we made a deal to meet each other at the same spot Tuesday at 2 pm. When I left I felt very bad, I walked slowly thinking about these people and what we were talking about. And I was very sad.

I have an idea to take photos of all of the graffiti on the walls of barracks because they send a strong message and talk about life and tragedy that the refugees are going through in Belgrade. I think it would be a good idea to make an exhibition with photos of everyday life of these wonderful people.

Each moment that is described here stays in my permanent memory and must not be forgotten ever.

Ljiljana Čantrak, NORAS 381

February 28, 2017

Today Mirko (WiB) and I took a lot of stuff to refugees in barracks. Lots of young refugees surrounded us in no time, lots of them teenagers, some of them just arrived from Bulgaria. Each one of them was asking for something. The whole time we were being filmed by a TV crew. The journalist approached us wanting to talk to us but he had no time for that. We told the refugees that from now on we will organize the distribution in a specific place at a specific time and that a guy named Hamayun Kahn will be helping us distribute everything.

Tomorrow I will go to see Hamayan Khan first and ask for a list of names and shoe sizes, then I'll be going to the office, pack things up and return to barracks. Mirko and I are going together tomorrow.

Ljiljana Čantrak, NORAS 381

March 1, 2007

Today Mirko and I took stuff for refugees to the barracks. First I went to see the "manager" (Hanayun Khan) who said he would help us satisfy the needs of refugees better, since he feels the same empathy and wants to cooperate with us.

I was at the barracks at 11 am and I was welcomed as a dear guest. I was offered with black tea right away. Every morning the volunteers from England are making tea, they didn't allow me to carry my heavy bag on me, everyone wanted to talk to me, we laughed, they told me what they needed, they met me with a guy who just arrived from Hungarian border. He came to Belgrade to the barracks badly injured, his arm broken and other wounds around his body. First Hanayun gave me the list with the names and sizes. These people have a great handwriting. One teenager came to me and told me that the shirt I brought him yesterday was for women. Luckily I had a nice shirt which I brought from home and gave it him.

It was raining and it became cold. I stayed longer there, I had to meet up with Mirko and prepare the clothes by the list I got.

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I was looking for sizes with Mirko in the office. It took us more than an hour to count and pack everything for refugees. As soon as we came to the barracks we talked to the people. It was very cold. A hot sunny day means a lot to them. Now everyone was in the barracks. We found our "manager" who had a broad smile on his face. I watched him as he was distributing the stuff we brought. I enjoyed watching them all take a package and look what they got. To me it was touching and nice, emotions took me over I couldn't make a single photo, I simply didn't want to miss a single moment.

As I was making a list in the office I checked twice if I didn't forget anything. One boy got great sneakers, the only pair of male shoes I could find. I'm always thinking about one thing: these wonderful people need everything now, food, hygiene kits, clothes, shoes as well as someone to talk to and smile to, shake hands with, a touch...

Then I went with our "manager" to the other part of the barrack and continued distributing. Every time a 13 year old boy runs to me and then he smiles at me with his beautiful green eyes and starts talking to me about everything. Today he told me that he liked the pants I brought him yesterday. Then he showed me where he sleeps and then walked me to the end of the barrack. They are so pleasant and well raised... Then he said goodbye to me until tomorrow when we'll see each other again.

Tomorrow I'll spend more time with our lovely friends, I won't hurry to go to the office, I want to spend more time talking to them. They are all eager for conversation, they like to laugh and ask me questions about where I live, what I do, who my family is etc.

Ljiljana Čantrak, NORAS 381

March 1, 2007

Today I went to the barracks twice. It was a nice morning, lots of volunteers were around barracks. The Englishmen were giving our morning tea. I saw students of the International School in Mostar. Their principal brought them here. Students already came to Belgrade several times to help refugees. I spoke to their principal about the life of refugees and the unbearable conditions they live in. During that time the students were collecting the trash and taking it to specified places where the garbage collecting service would come and most likely take it to the dumping ground.

Today I saw refugees from the shelter in Obrenovac who came here to take one meal only. They looked terrible, these kind of situations always break me as a human being, it makes me angry and want to cry...

Ljiljana Čantrak, NORAS 381

March 3, 2007

Today near the barracks while I was waiting for the bus at the station, a tiny man came to me, a refugee. He barely spoke English, tried to explain to me with his hands that he needed pants and a shirt. I'm assuming he saw me in the barracks. He told me he sleeps on the parking lot, near hotel Bristol, he eats in barracks but spends time at the parking lot. He said he sleeps on concrete floor. I told him I would bring him clothes tomorrow. He could barely understand me. I told him we should meet at 1 pm. I think at the end we understood each other. We said goodbye. Soon afterwards the guy comes back bringing another refugee who speaks English. I was really moved by this. I told everything to his friend and promised to bring him clothes.

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Every day I meet lots of people who live in these conditions in barracks. I watch as they fight without giving up, I listen to their communication with each other, I try hard to remember every moment spent with them. And every time I walk back I feel sad and broken. I'm so unhappy.

As I watch these people surviving, I try to put myself in their position but I know I would never be able to overcome this kind of situation. I try hard to give them as much as I am able to do so.

When the refugee crisis started in 2015 and when I started volunteering at Miksalište, my experience then was drastically different, everything was simpler and easier. Probably because most refugees were coming from Syria and because it was only the beginning. Now it's completely different, more horrible, harder and way less bearable, and every day is harder than the last one...

Ljiljana Čantrak, NORAS 381