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Solidarity with war refugees

REFUGEES AT THE WOMEN'S MARCH "ARISE, VICTIMS OF OPPRESSION!"

March 8, 2017

The strongest moment in the whole street march was probably at the "Afghan Park" point at the Faculty of Economics where hundreds of protesters gathered. When they heard "Solidarity with refugees", "Refugees are welcome", "No one is illegal", "Europe, open the borders...", refugees from all over were coming to join us chanting "Azadi/Freedom/Sloboda", "Stop the war, not refugees..."

We sang the "Women's International", the refugees didn't understand the words but our solidarity and closeness they understood very well. Our women drummers upped the rhythm, more and more refugees marched with us chanting in English, Serbian and their own languages paroles regarding their wish for freedom and right for a place on earth...

In front of the social center Magacin the energy was at its highest peak. We asked the refugees to enter first, to share food with them. They hesitated a bit, they wanted to see the exhibition of women's March 8 actions first. We hung out, talked, laughed, ate together... We packed them food so they could eat in the park and share it with others who arrived later to the park and didn't get a chance to join us.

Meeting with refugees was probably the most touching act of feminist international solidarity during this street march.

Noted by: Staša



VISIBLE AND INVISIBLE - RICH AND POOR

March 9, 2017

Women in Black organized a visit to refugees to make lunch for them. They bought everything at the market and together with Fahro, Mirko and Staša went to see the refugees behind the bus station in Belgrade. However, we didn't prepare the food since volunteers from Spain are already here and they're cooking for them and distribute the food.



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We went to see all of the refugees and spoke to them. They were pleased to see us. Their living conditions are poor. The premises of the abandoned barracks are dark, they're burning wood themselves, it's full of smoke there. People live like bats...

One boy with torn red sneakers was following us the whole time looking for shoes. Staša went to the Doctors Without Borders and found him a pair. He was so happy, I helped him put on the shoes. They are gathered at the place around the so called No Name Kitchen, that's where they charge their phones. I'm pleased to know that at least somebody is looking after them. Phones are their connection to the outside world. We waited until evening when they were given out food. The line was long but they all waited patiently and calmly for their meal.

At least they weren't starving. We noticed that the conditions were improved as far as cleanliness is concerned, they have taps where they can wash their face and clothes. Some of them bathe with cold water in the improvised bathing cabins.

Ljilja from NORAS 381 organization brought them clothes. They are in great need for clothing and it should be gathered whenever possible.

One could see the social life right on the spot - the division on the rich who are visible, and the poor who are invisible. At this very place they're building Belgrade Waterfront where even the fence has lights while behind it are naked and barefoot people in the dark like bats in abandoned barracks, eager for dignity.

In all this darkness and hopelessness I saw that there are still good people who are at the refugees' service, representing their sparks of light in their survival. People who are helping are from Spain, Italy, Belgrade... I hope that reason will prevail, that borders will open up and that these people will find normal living conditions, as it suits a human being.

Noted by: Ramiz Berbić, Tuzla, Bosnia and Herzegovina

"WILL THEY OPEN BORDERS FOR US...?"

March 9, 2017

Staša, Mirko, Fahrudin and Ramiz brought food, candy and unavoidable tea. We brought lots of pants and shirts, a few pairs of socks. They already know us very well since we're here with them every day. As usual someone would approach us to say hello, shake our hand, smile at us and tell us he's fine.

I'm always fascinated by these meetings. When I come back home and think about it I feel sorry for not noticing some of them as they run towards us. It reminds me of the time when we were kids and full heartedly were running towards someone we liked.

As soon as they see us they say hello and ask us how we're doing, how's our family. Some of them wait for the right moment to jump in and tell us their story. Those moments are the most precious for me, that's why I note them down and I will never forget them.

I was looking for Hamayan Khan in the room he shared with his cousin. I couldn't find him, I asked his friends, they said he's in the park. He tried to cross the border with Hungary a week ago but failed. He came back to barracks where he'll stay until his next attempt.

We went to the Spanish kitchen, it's a nice space where volunteers from Spain make evening meals. We left them all the food we bought and then returned later when they were giving out really delicious meals. I made a few video record-

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ings to remember these moments. Each moment is worthy, this is history in the making. Every time they see me filming they smile and make the two finger sign as a simbol of victory.

Staša arranged with Lidia, a Spanish volunteer who makes the meals, to prepare the food which WiB will be bringing each week.

Two Italian volunteers were with us as a part of the WiB network. They wanted to see the barracks and witness the tragedy of people who are simply trapped inside Belgrade. We exchanged contact information to keep in touch.

Last night I had a long conversation with a guy from Afghanistan. We talked about their situation, political moves of the states that set up the barriers, new measures by the Hungarian government as well as which European countries are the best suitable for life.

Then he asked me: "What do you think, is it possible to cross the border and reach a European country? Is it possible to succeed, will they open the borders?" They have a right to freedom and life. That's why I always say that they are winners in life, they will win...

Noted by: Ljiljana Čantrak, NORAS 381

„WHY IS EUROPE NOT TREATING US AS HUMANS?“

Saturday, March 11 2017

Today I had a meeting with two young women from Doctors of the World organization. They came from Paris. First we spent some time in Miksalište, then we went to see both parking lots: one near hotel Bristol, the other at the Faculty of Economics. Today I found out that there's a third parking lot near with around 300 young people.

They were in awe as to how come the refugees are allowed to stay at the parking lot since they government is a lot stricter in Paris towards them. We went to the barracks right when the Food Idomeni was distributing meals. I spoke with the men in the line for food, a lot of them came asking for clothes. Most of them looked really bad, without shoes. A huge number of them came back from the border, they were muddy and ripped... Everything I brought was gone in a blink of an eye.

Later on we saw parts of barracks which they call "home". We spoke to several men who sitting there, they asked why Europe is not treating them like humans, why are they being compared to the Taliban. Why can Europe not understand that never wanted to leave their country? They wouldn't leave their parents if they didn't have to escape death. They repeatedly said they have a right to look for better life. I only nodded, I didn't have anything to say to him, I told them I understand them, that we're all trying to make their life easier, at least while they're in Belgrade. They said Belgrade is a very nice city, that Serbia, as they say, is a wonderful country, people are so good... This group of young people is in barracks more than 4 months.

I took this chance to go and see Hamayun Khan. He didn't succeed in crossing the border, he returned to the barracks. When I asked him whether he will try it again any time soon, he sadly replied: "No, not a chance." His failed attempt in crossing to Hungary left a scar on his face. He used to be happy and smile, now he was down and absent minded. When he got on the train to Hungary he was neat, fresh, smiling and full of hope.

Noted by: Ljiljana Čantrak, NORAS 381

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ABDUL'S BIRTHDAY

March 12, 2017

While I was waiting for Mirko I went to see our old pals. I took them homemade cornbread. I brought some shirts I found in my closet. I brought gifts for Abdul who celebrated his birthday yesterday.

I spent about an hour with refugees outside, lunch was over quickly, it was very cold and raining. Everyone was inside the freezing barracks, almost no one was outside.

We talked about the bad weather, they came to me to say cornbread was delicious. Some of them were asking for clothes, pants, shirts... I was getting more and more desperate since I can't help many of them...

Mirko and I were served tea in a small house by three Pakistani guys who invited us over.

Noted by: Ljiljana Čantrak, NORAS 381

IS THERE GOING TO BE A NEW POST-ELECTION CLEAN UP OF REFUGEE BARRACKS?

March 14, 2017

Today it was sunny and nice, we brought our friends from the barracks a lot of clothes and shoes, they tried it on and exchanged sizes. Hamayun Khan was still feeling down but the tea we offered him cheered him up. These days some new guys came from the Bulgarian border and told us about the cruelty in closed camps there, about the fear of people there... They don't know where to go. They are stuck in Belgrade barracks.

The Spanish No Name Kitchen has a name - international solidarity. Those that arrive from Aragon, Navarra, Madrid, Vitoria... they witness solidarity and responsibility in Europe, all of the refugees are proud of this Spanish kitchen.

There's a lot of people around the kitchen, it's dinner time. Vahida from Belgrade, Mireia from Barcelona and Natalia from Madrid are speaking to the refugees about Pashtu classes. Manana, manana (thank you, thank you) we tell each other. When we run out of words, we simply look at each other and smile.

The lights of the Belgrade Waterfront are shining, we got goose bumps when we saw that they're building a road, that the hoop around barracks is tightening. Is there going to be a new clean up of the city from refugees? After presidential elections on April 2, 2017. New round of demolition like the one last year in April, the same night of the parliamentary elections? This regime has perfected its practice and ideology of cleansing - of the unwanted - on an ideological, class-social, ethnic-racial and every other basis. The refugees are the most vulnerable and most endangered amongst the unwanted ones...

Noted by: Staša