

The future starts today

by Cara Gibney

After the meeting with a number of NGOs in Sarajevo, I am left with the impression that non-violence is not considered to be a practical attitude towards the events in Yugoslavia. Also that humanitarian aid for Kosovar refugees is the most practical and possible response, and that joint condemnation of the violence of Milosevic, NATO and UCK is too difficult.

I think, that the idea of humanitarian aid being the most concrete form of support is a short-term measure. Humanitarian aid is essential in dealing with what has already happened (the ongoing refugee crisis in and around Yugoslavia needs all the support it can get), and because of this I understand why work such as CNA's is not seen as a practical way to deal with the present. But it concerns me when dealing with the future is not seen as a practical response.

NATO reports that it is 'bombing military targets' in order to weaken the power of Milosevic's troops. To destroy the tools of their brutal trade. But even without these tools, even if the soldiers are disarmed of their weapons, it will not disarm the minds of the people who want events in Kosovo to continue. In a television interview I heard one young member of the UCK say that he will fight Serb troops without any weapons if he has to. This is what is shaping the future of the Balkans today.

In my opinion NGOs in BiH are dealing with the direct and indirect consequences of the violence that happened here, and with the limitations of the short-term aid that BiH received. The NGO sector is a main sector dealing with cross-community, inter-ethnic and inter-religious work. It has many different foci, skills and objectives. I see the space for non-violence to have a credible voice in this sector. If this sector does not see non-violence as practical, then it will be a long time before the people outside the NGO scene will consider it. And time is the point here. People, communities, societies, we all need time to move on from experiences of violence. I do not mean forgetting these experiences, or the victims. I mean not living and re-living them. One old Irish Republican said, "the future starts today", and if we do not put effort into it, it will be shaped solely by other forces.

I think working towards non-violence is as practical and immediate as caring for the victims of violence.

These thoughts are the response to a number of questions I have been asking myself recently. I very much want and need feedback on the issues raised. I have put them in the form of questions below. Your responses would be appreciated.

In Sarajevo; April 1999.