

CROATIA

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members of their peace organizations, so we said to them that we were acting on our own as well. With small numbers, we lost hope for the protest. We went back to Mennonite's house and let the teen-agers eat something (They didn't - or couldn't - eat anything on that day.). After a bit of chatting, we went to sleep.

In the next morning, Harky, Jim, Gert, the teen-agers and I headed for Makarska at 6. We reached Makarska before 8 and sent back the teenagers from the closed gas station to the hotel. Harky had to go back to Split to attend the U.N. briefing, so the rest of us stayed there. Without any back-up, the only thing we could do was to observe the situation. The buses to pick up Muslim refugees came to the reception area, and a police car came as well. We observed the situation and sometimes went up to the compound far away from the reception area to talk with the circus families. In the reception area, Muslim refugees reluctantly gathered around the buses. Italian peace activists with a parliamentarian had arrived by that time. One 70-year-old woman who had a heart problem was sent to a hospital. Those who had health problems were to stay in the hotel for several days but had to eventually move to Obonja. We went back and forth between the reception area and the compound where the circus families stayed. In the reception area, one woman asked me about the conditions of Obonja while crying. All I could say was that the security should be ensured because some humanitarian organizations including Mennonites were staying there and many observers and journalists visited and would visit there. Another Muslim woman was trying to report about physical insult against her by Croats to one policeman. Sasha asked me to come to the compound, so I left Jim and went up to the compound. When I left, I saw some soldiers coming from the rehabilitation center. Jim said 10 soldiers came and tried to intimidate Muslims by saying that they would kill them. Jim was trying to defend the refugees, but the soldiers threatened to kill him because they believed he was a journalist. Policemen just stood there, not really protecting people. People and Italians begged policemen to stay there, but they left soon after buses were gone for Obonja even though there were still some Muslims in the hotel. In a country engaging in a war, it's very difficult to deal with soldiers because they are to be respected.

The circus families refused to go to Obonja. They wanted to stay somewhere in Split until they could get in touch with the German group. We respected their opinion, and Jim made a decision that they should go to Mennonite's house. Then, an "escape operation" began. We helped to carry their belongings to the old gas station. With the Italians' help, the circus families were brought to

the bus station with me to catch the bus for Mennonite's house. Later on, Harky came to take all of the baggage and picked up Jim and Gert. In the bus, I talked with Saya, Sasha and Jasmin, who could speak English very well. Saya is a smart girl and tried to do a translation job to a large extent. Sasha is an innocent boy, who was always smiling in the presence of people. His father is a Croat, who is fighting as a BiH soldier in Sarajevo. But because his mother is a Muslim (she said she is an atheist), they had to move out. Jasmin and his mother had already prepared a document for immigration to Germany, but later on the Embassy told them to wait for a month to get a visa. We talked about the United States, Japan and BiH, and finally all of us got off at the bus station near Mennonite's house. At that time, I was staying in a hotel, but I decided to stay in Mennonite's house until their immigration was confirmed.

On the next day, Harky obtained new information from UNHCR. There is another hotel called Osejava in Makarska, 10 minutes away from Hotel Riviera by car. The hotel had a mixed population of Muslim and Bosnian Croats refugees, but Bosnian Croats moved out and filled the place of Muslims in Hotel Riviera. If the circus families wanted, they had to check in the hotel before 7 in the next morning. Harky decided to talk about this with the families after dinner, and he let the mothers cook a Bosnian meal. In that evening, we had a small dinner party and all enjoyed a taste of Balkans. Kids were trying to make Bosnian coffee and proudly serving for us. It was a nice moment with a family-like atmosphere.

After the party, Saya (as an interpreter), Sasha, Jasmin and all of the mothers remained in the dining room and talked with us about what they were going to do. By that time, Wolfgang came back from Brac and joined the discussion. Harky explained the information from UNHCR. All of them said "no" to the Makarska plan. They were afraid of going back to Makarska, particularly the mothers. Who can blame them after their severe experiences there? What the mothers worried about most was their children's safety. They would not want to go back to the town, where even kids and elderly were harassed although Hotel Osejava was a bit away from Hotel Riviera. There were several options: going to Obonja, moving to another refugee camp in Varazdin and finding private accommodations. They didn't want to go to Obonja. Varazdin was not an option provided by Croatian authority, and they were not invited from that camp in first place. As for private accommodations, it would be very difficult to put 17 people in one place, and it might be dangerous. They had a consciousness as one circus group, so their wish was to stay together whatever might happen to them.

We were moved by solidarity and love among the circus families in times of crisis. At the same time, we knew that they were facing a harsh reality. They had to decide where to go because it was not absolutely safe even in Mennonite's house and

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