

CROATIA

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accommodation for refugees from BiH in Hotel Galeb. We wanted to check in the hotel, but we were refused. Then, we looked for a place to stay all afternoon, but no one was willing to let us stay. Resort towns in Brac, including Povolja, once prospered from tourism. But because of economic crisis and the reducing numbers of tourists, small towns got a hard hit. The town looked gray and silent in contrast to the pure, light blue color of the sea and lively movement of fish there. Probably, residents in the town were proud people, and they didn't want to show their miserable situation to outsiders.

Even considering the situation of people in Povolja, we had to find a place to stay. We heard that there was a Japanese woman who was living in the village, so we visited her house, hoping to find mercy from a person of the same nationality as mine. It turned out to be that she was a nice person and willing to let us stay in her house. She and her husband (a Croat) didn't ask for money but entertained us with their homemade wine. She said eight people are now living in Croatia, but she is the only one who got married a native Croat. Her husband knew a lot about Japan (he is an aikido teacher), and his profound knowledge about Japan made me feel at home for a while.

We visited Hotel Galeb again. There were 156 refugees including 80 children from Sarajevo, Mostar, B.Luka, D.Vakuf and Vugojno in BiH (50 percent Muslims and 50 percent Croats). It was impossible for Muslims to go to school in Croatia, so the IMO and Suncokret have been helping them to establish kindergarten, pre-school, theater, library, music room and so on. One leader of the refugee camp, Stela Tomas, was a Croat from Sarajevo. "But there was no way to prove," she said, "because I didn't have any written documents about my identity." So, she has been working with Suncokret volunteers to coordinate programs for refugees for more than a year.

"Without help from IMO and Suncokret, we couldn't do anything," Tomas said. It took seven months to organize facilities and programs for refugees. Some girls are taking a training course to become hairdressers. The hotel got sewing machines so that refugees would be able to finish the products after raw materials were provided. "Refugees can feel secure and confident in a way," Tomas said, "because they are not wasting their time but doing something."

Of course, she wants to go back to Sarajevo as

soon as possible, though her house might have been burned down. She often thinks about Sarajevo and her life there before the war. There are often quarrels and fightings among refugee kids in the hotel. "Sometimes I feel disturbed by those refugees because they do very stupid fightings," she said, "I get depressed and stay in my room for a few days, not seeing anyone. But I'll go back to them. And the same thing happens again and again." While contributing to refugees actively as a leader, she is still longing for what was lost.

I had enough strength to move around, so I went to U.N. briefing. Later on, Harky, Gert, Sasha and I went to the TCCS commercial area in Stobric. In TCCS, a convoy of 86 trucks with humanitarian aid has been detained for nearly five months. They were mostly men (and mostly Muslims) with some women and children. They didn't receive enough food, and water and sanitary conditions were really bad. Recently, peace activists have been doing a night watch because there has been harassment by Croatian military police. According to one peace activist, four trucks and two cars were taken by Croatian military police and three drivers were arrested with no indication of their whereabouts.

Trucks were orderly in two lines. People were sleeping under the trucks and spending time by playing cards or singing songs. They welcomed our visit and willingly let us take pictures. I talked with one woman through Sasha, and all they wanted was just to go back home in Tuzla. But it was too dangerous for them to go though BiH because of intense fighting between the BiH army and HVO. It seemed they were intimidated enough by Croatian military police to hold their departure.

According to the verbal agreement between the governments of Herceg-Bosna, BiH and the HVO, the convoy was supposed to leave TCCS for Tuzla in BiH on Aug. 19. UNPROFOR would not be allowed to accompany the convoy in BiH, and the convoy didn't leave as planned. Six drivers were arrested the day before they were supposed to leave, and they returned several hours later. The convoy was not willing to depart because of its concerns for its own safety.

We left TCCS and returned to Mennonite's house, and we were about to leave for Makarska again. When I saw refugee children in Hotel Osejava, it was strange but a children's smile is the best medicine.

Gert, another volunteer from Mir Sada and I did the last night watch in Makarska. On the next day, the three of us left Makarska. The refugee children, including Sasha and Saya, saw us off at the bus station. I had good moments with them, and I hope that nothing dangerous will happen to them and that they will be able to have a "normal" life. Now it's like a dream.

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