

Report on the 14th, 15th and 16th Human Rights Schools

August 2006-September 2007

🌿 **About the Human Rights School**

The Human Rights School (further in the text HRSchool) is a part of a wider project - ***Human Rights Schools*** organized in Macedonia, Serbia, Montenegro, Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Croatia, which are initiated by the Norwegian Helsinki Committee for Human Rights.

The local part of the program was organized by two partner organizations – the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights of the Republic of Macedonia and the Center for Human Rights and Conflict Resolution.

🌿 **Goals of the Human Rights School**

The 11th HR School was organized and led around the following goals:

- rising awareness about the concept of human rights;
- providing knowledge about the institutions and mechanisms for human rights protection;
- promotion of the concepts of interethnic understanding and peaceful conflict resolution;
- providing forum for a critical dialogue among young people belonging to different ethnic groups where they can freely discuss, become friends and cooperate;
- providing knowledge about student's rights and responsibilities as well as the available mechanisms for the protection of student's rights;

The possibility to meet and to get familiar with students from other ethnic groups in a supportive surrounding enhanced the interethnic understanding and the respect for the cultural differences. During the sessions, the students had opportunity to learn more about each other in the sense of their personal attitudes but also about their traditions and cultures. This was strengthened during the social time activities when they were associating with each other in different groups and activities. During the all the schools mentioned above, mutual cooperation and friendship regardless of the ethnic background was on a very high level.

- The 14th HR School took part in *Hotel St. Naum, Ohrid, 17-26th August, 2006*. It was organized by two partner organizations – the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights of the Republic of Macedonia and the Center for Human Rights and Conflict Resolution. This hotel was selected for several reasons, first Ohrid is traditionally the place where the HRSchools are held because we assume that there is more tolerance towards the members of different ethnic/religious communities as a popular tourist destination, but also for the same reason it was not easy to find a hotel that meets our requirements. Hotel St. Naum was chosen among the few options because of its location-it does not get so crowded-even in the peak of the tourist season, and because the management was prepared to meet our budget.

- The 15th HR School took part in Ohrid, hotel Belvedere, from 12-21th January, 2007. It was organized by two partner organizations – the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights of the Republic of Macedonia and the Center for Human Rights and Conflict Resolution. This hotel was selected for several reasons, first Ohrid is traditionally the place where the HRSchools are held because we assume that there is more tolerance towards the members of different ethnic/religious communities as a popular tourist destination, but also for the same reason it was not easy to find a hotel that meets our requirements.
- The 16th HR School took part near Struga (also on the Ohrid Lake), in Hotel Biser, from 21-28 June, 2007. That region is again chosen for the reasons mentioned above. And the specific hotel was only one available and able to meet our requirements due to the fact that it was the beginning of the peak of the tourist season.

🌿 **Participants of the school (selection and participation)**

The group of participants consisted of twenty two to twenty-four high school/faculty students at the age between 17 and 22 from different regions of Macedonia (Bitola, Gostivar, Veles, Skopje, Prilep, Shtip Berovo, Delcevo, Valandovo, Kumanovo). The participants were selected among the largest ethnic groups in Macedonia – Macedonian, Albanian, Turkish and Roma. The group was balanced, with respect to the ethnic and gender criteria.

During the selection procedure, we were oriented towards students with leadership potentials, who were expected to initiate and undertake activities for promotion of the concept of human rights in their local communities. The selection procedure for the HRSchools included several steps:

- contact with the directors of the schools;
- introduction of the HR School in front of the class (after the consent for entering the classes was approved);
- motivating interested students to participate in the interview;
- group interviews;
- pre-selection of the participants, according to the results from the interviews;
- invitation of the pre-selected participants (a precondition for participation: written approval from their parents);
- preparing the final list of participants, after confirmation of the invited participants that provided written approval from their parents;

Due to the new approach strategy agreed on the regional meetings last year, a new selection/targeting strategy is used. On those meetings the regional team agreed upon the issue that every local committee should define the specific targeting groups to address the HRSchools. The local team responsible for organizing HRSchools in Macedonia recognized the need to continue addressing the HRSchools to a wide range of high-school students, but also to a specific population that's expected to have some impact on the wider range of the population. So, the fourteenth HRSchool was organized for representatives from political party youth from the "most important" Macedonian and Albanian political parties. The fifteenth HRSchool, was held for young activist from the School of Tolerance – from the "Gostivar" high-school, in Gostivar-school that has courses on Albanian, Macedonian and Turk teaching language. Other specific population that is recognized as important is the

future teachers (students of the faculty for teachers). The sixteenth HRSchool is organized for them. On the fifteenth and sixteenth HRSchools were present students from the Police Academy in Skopje (ones that had shown high scores on the Human Rights course) as social assistants. The decision to invite them is a multiple goal strategy, they got the chance to upgrade their knowledge about Human Rights issues, to practice them and also to empower them as potential Human Rights activists.

The necessity of this procedure derived from the presumption that a personal contact, through a short interview, can offer more authentic impression concerning the above-mentioned criteria for selection.

Daily activities – sessions, social time and theatre workshops

Each day, two sessions were held – one in the morning, from 10:00 to 13:30 and the other in the afternoon, from 17:00 to 19:30.

Within the sessions following topics were covered:

- ☺ Getting to know each other
- ☺ Respecting the differences
- ☺ Culture, multicultural, stereotypes
- ☺ Introduction to the Concept of Human Rights
- ☺ Discrimination and equality
- ☺ Gender equality
- ☺ Civil society
- ☺ Participation
- ☺ Responsibilities and acting
- ☺ Goodbye activities

The sessions were carried out in a form of workshops, which means that all topics were elaborated through activities in which active involvement of the participants was crucial.

The workshops, including the working materials for the workshops, were carefully prepared in advance. Most of the workshops involve group work, presentation of the results by the group representatives, and discussion about the controversial issues raised within the group as well as during the presentations. The participants took active role in all discussions and had opportunity to share their experiences and opinions with the others.

Several of the workshops involve simulation games. For example, one of the basic activities for understanding the global inequality, poverty, and discrimination was realized during the breakfast, when randomly selected participants were seated at different tables with different amount and quality of food. The largest group was seated at the poorest table, the middle group was seated at the table with better food, and the smallest group of 5 participants was seated at the richest table. In this activity all participants took part (the students and the team). This was aimed to show the world's unequal distribution of goods and to explore the meaning of discrimination and unequal treatment through personal experience. After this activity a discussion was undertaken, which was led at two levels – emotional and cognitive. The first was the emotional debriefing of the very strong emotions raised from the situation of inequality, unfairness and discrimination, as well as confusion and uncertainty. Then the cognitive insights were elicited in order to close up with an unambiguous concept of the discrimination.

This is an example of the typical development of the activities during the workshops. In the evenings, 3 movies were presented, dealing with human rights issues: "Gods must have gone crazy", "In and Out" and "The Siege". In a separate workshop involving group work, presentations, and critical discussion, the students were focused on the human rights abuses committed in "The Siege" as well as on the representation of the victims and perpetrators by the director of the movie.

The social time was structured through various activities such as sports, group games, walks and visits to places of cultural value in Ohrid. These activities were organized in between the two sessions and in the evening hours, during which the students could get to know each other better in an informal way and could deepen their communication.

The theater workshops were held every second evening, between 21:30 and 23:00. They encompassed 3 parts – (1) activities for relaxation, (2) activities for concentration and (3) role-play. The first two groups of activities provided possibilities for relaxing and reenergizing at the end of the day. The third part offered opportunity for self-expression in a new and conducted way by playing different roles, which was amusing and fun, but also provoking. The series of theater workshops ended with several performances, prepared by the participants in regard to the human rights topics that were discussed throughout the school. It was a great opportunity for the participants to incorporate their insights and knowledge gained through the workshops in a creative and stimulating way. The audience (all the participants and the team members) followed the performances with great enjoyment.

🌱 Team members responsible for the realization of the schools (sessions and social time):

Team members engaged HRSchools:

Mirjana Najcevska, University Professor, Co-Director of the Center for Human Rights and Conflict Resolution, Skopje

Sasho N. Alushevski, assistant - Center for Human Rights and Conflict Resolution , coordinator of the Human Rights Schools, Skopje

Safet Ballazi, assistant - Center for Human Rights and Conflict Resolution, Skopje

Luan Imeri, assistant - Center for Human Rights and Conflict Resolution, Skopje

Team members, associates, partly engaged (on one or two HRSchools):

Zoja Buzalkova, assistant - Faculty for Drama, Skopje

Igor Aleksov, associate - student of film directing at the NATFIZ, Sofia, responsible for the Theater workshops

Idaver Memedov, assistant - Helsinki Committee for Human Rights of the Republic of Macedonia, Skopje

Renata Dedova, assistant - Center for Human Rights and Conflict Resolution

Žarko Stanimirović, associate - Center for Human Rights and Conflict Resolution as a social assistant.

Frosina Dodevska, associate - Center for Human Rights and Conflict Resolution, social assistant

Amra Jakupi, associate - Center for Human Rights and Conflict Resolution as a social assistant.

Majlinda Ajdari, associate - associate - Center for Human Rights and Conflict Resolution as a social assistant.

Azamela Koca, third year student at the police academy, Skopje, Macedonia

Pavle Bogoevski, third year student at the police academy, Skopje, Macedonia

Maja Kuzmanovska, third year student at the police academy, Skopje, Macedonia

Viktorija Simonovska, third year student at the police academy, Skopje, Macedonia

Guest lecturer:

Violeta Petroska Beska, University Professor of Psychology, Co-Director of the Center for Human Rights and Conflict Resolution, Skopje

*** The students from the police academy in Skopje, Macedonia, were invited to participate and learn during the HRScool, as a result of the cooperation between the police academy and the organizations responsible for the program.**

🌿 Evaluation

Different aspects of the School were evaluated by all participants who were filling out the evaluation lists at the end of the official program. The following aspects were evaluated:

■ The School in general

The school in general was very highly evaluated followed by comments that mostly referred to the excellent organization and functioning of the school. Some commented they learned something that could not learn elsewhere. Also, the personal growth, unexpected experiences, unimaginable and unpredictable tolerance among them were the most usual comments, in addition, the 10 days program seems that was not enough for some of the participants. (*I had the time of my life here, I learned a lot and I met great people here, I had an unforgettable experience-participant*)

■ The workshops

The general impression of the workshops is that they were very good, with good concept, and well organized. They liked the way of work – learning through games and activities (related to the real life), which led to a conclusion and new learning. However, parts of the workshops at moments were exhausting and lasted too long, some of the workshops were not so interesting. Two favorite workshops were the discussion on the topics of torture, abortion and death penalty and the session dedicated to homosexuality, when they had to position themselves depending on whether they agree or disagree with particular statements. Some of the students

liked the best the workshop on environmental issue. The workshops that they did not like were those that were more theoretical, or that were demanding their initiative and engagement for action. (*We should work at school in similar way, I wish my teachers could seen you-* participant. *Excellent selection of the topics and treatment-* participant)

■ **The social time**

The comments about the social time were various: some were very positive, especially in regard to the organization of the social time and the opportunities to meet different people; but some were more critical in regard to the organization of the social time and to the high level of supervision from the social assistants, as well as to the lack of free time. (*...I've had a time of my life! Beside workshops I thought that during the free time I'll be bored. But I was wrong-you made it great too.* - participant)

■ **The theater workshop**

The theater workshop was evaluated in a most positive manner from all participants. The comments referred both to the quality of time spent and to the greatness of the leader of the workshops. They benefited a lot in a personal and group level. This workshop, by plenty of the students was characterized as the one that emotionally tied them as a group. They liked the activities, the acting and the opportunity to discover their personality in a new, unconventional and exciting way. Also, these workshops had a great impact to the group building and dynamics. (*...I'm sure that I will use some of these techniques with my future students, it's so powerful-* participant-faculty for teachers)

■ **The organization of the School**

The participants in general were satisfied with the accommodation and the food. Some of the participants had remarks on the food, which was mainly based on chicken meet, however for some was actually the best thing. For plenty of them the possibility to chose the food was very pleasing. (This is the best organized seminar I've ever been to-participant-political party youth)

■ **The participants of the School**

The group was evaluated as wonderful, with high level of friendship and closeness. They also had fun and enjoyed spending time together. The personal evaluations were quite self-critical and sincere. Those who participated less in the discussions obviously became aware of it, but they empathized that it did not restrain them from new learning. (*I made so many good friends here I would like to take them all at my place, to be honest I expected divisions and fights but now I can see that with a right approach everybody can communicate in a positive manner,* participant-political party youth)

■ **The team members**

All the team members were perceived very positive, especially those who took care of them, associate with them, had understanding and contributed to the creation of a relaxed atmosphere. Some of the recommendations required even more openness and friendship. (*I would like to learn the tips of the trade and be so efficient and GOOD teacher like you were,* participant - faculty for teachers)

■ **What I expected but I did not get**

Most frequent expectations, which were not fulfilled at the school, were: more time to sleep and going out to the town. The unexpected outcomes that they liked were related to the high level of friendship and interrelatedness, good organization and interesting time. (*Dull sessions and school-like system but I had the time of my life, participant*)

■ **What I did not expect but I got**

The comments were mostly related to the atmosphere at the school and the emotional changes that they had experienced, as well as the quality and quantity of new information they received in the last 10 days. One of the most frequent comments was that they did not expect to gain so many new friends. (*so many new things, whole new universe is revealed for me, participant*)

■ **Recommendations for better Human Rights School**

The participants would like the HRSchool to endure longer, the sessions to be shorter and the social time to be longer. Some would like to watch other movies (*to have more schools, participant; to organize another school for us, participant*)

The outcome of the evaluation should be interpreted in a wider context, beyond the HR School itself. The experiences they gained were quite different from those they usually have at their schools and neighborhoods and were perceived as very positive and desired. It is mainly the atmosphere of respect for each other, the equal treatment for every person, the right of expression, the right of thought, the respect of differences, and all the other aspects of communication in the spirit of the Human Rights practice.

🌱 **Difficulties**

In general, during the 11th HRSchool, there were no immense difficulties that affected the participants and the implementation of the program itself. Few participants complained about the accommodation on the first day, but after the change of their rooms, no one else made any complaint about the accommodation.

🌱 **Additional activities**

The e-mails of the participants were added to an existing mailing list from previous schools, for easy communication among all the participants and to share opinions with larger group of high school students with similar trainings.