

STARFISH STORY

A friend of ours was walking down a deserted Mexican beach at sunset. As he walked along, he began to see another man in the distance. As he grew nearer, he noticed that the local native kept leaning down, picking something up and throwing it out into the water. Time and again he kept hurling things out into the ocean.

As our friend approached even closer, he noticed that the man was picking up starfish that had been washed up on the beach, and one at a time, he was throwing them back into the water.

Our friend was puzzled. He approached the man and said, "Good evening friend. I was wondering what you are doing?"

"I'm throwing these starfish back into the ocean. You see, it's low tide right now and all of these starfish have been washed up onto the shore. If I don't throw them back into the ocean, they'll die up here from lack of oxygen."

"I understand," my friend replied, "but there must be thousands of starfish on this beach. You can't possibly get all of them. There are simply too many. And don't you realize this is probably happening on hundreds of beaches all up and down this coast. Can't you see that you can't possibly make a difference?"

The local native smiled, bent down and picked up yet another starfish, and as he threw it back into the sea, he replied, "Made a difference to that one!"

Jack Canfield and Mark V. Hansen

„The best town for living is one in which a foreigner feels at home...”

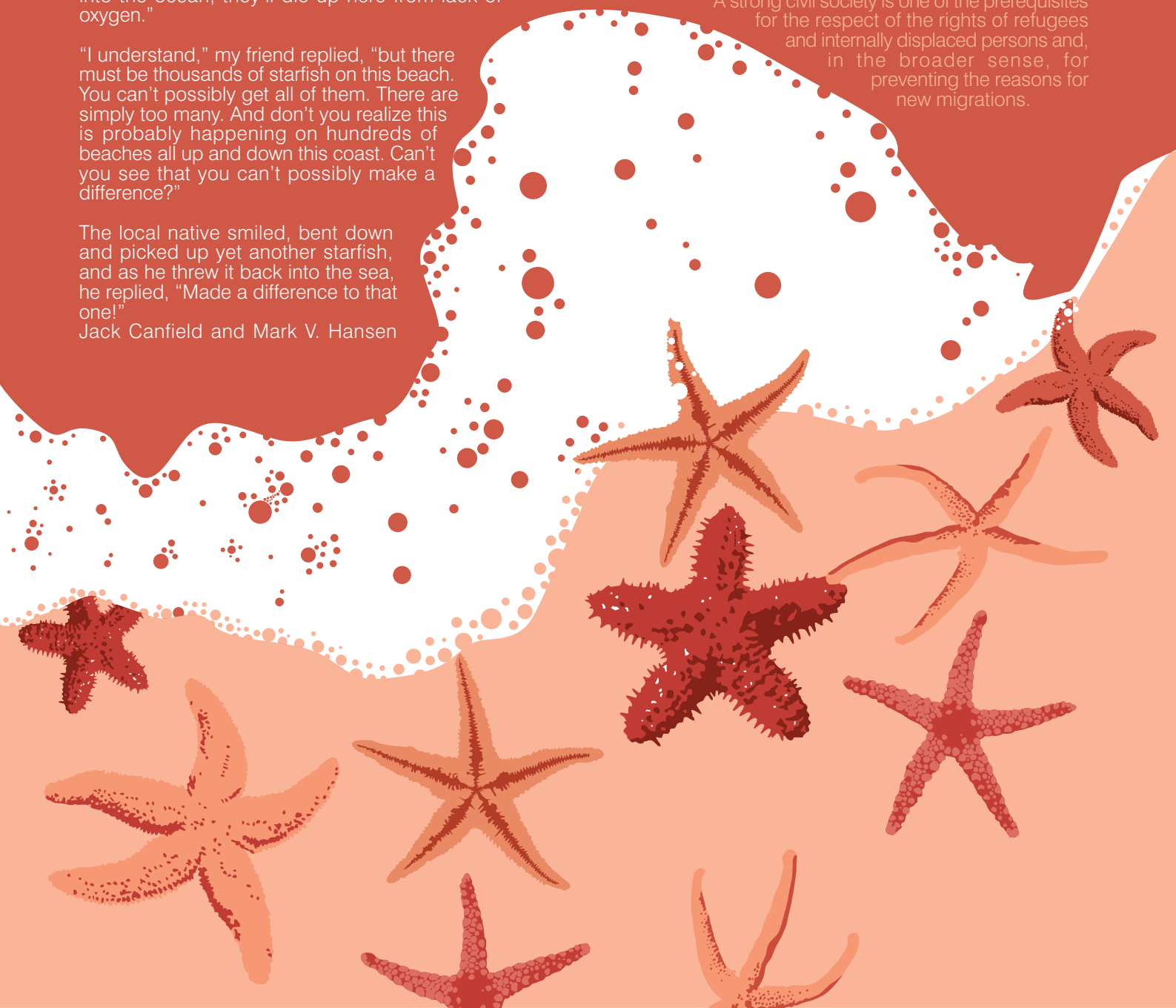
Italo Calvino

A non-profit, non-governmental organisation, Group 484 works to empower „forced migrants” (refugees, internally displaced persons, asylum-seekers) to actively seek their rights, and encourage local population, especially young people, to embrace and respect diversity.

We wish to create a world in which people will be free to choose where to live, and in which all their rights and differences will be respected.

Together with local communities, organisations and individuals – and particularly with the youth of this country – we strive to empower people to take initiative and fully participate in building a democratic society where all human rights are respected.

A strong civil society is one of the prerequisites for the respect of the rights of refugees and internally displaced persons and, in the broader sense, for preventing the reasons for new migrations.



Introductory Word

I

August 1995

Several months after I had joined Jelena Šantić as a volunteer, there we were, standing together on the sidewalk in Petra Kočića Street. Jelena opened her big bag full of papers about ballet and refugees. She dug out an envelope and said, "I'm off to Holland to raise money for these poor souls from Krajina. With the money we got so far, you must see that we get some diapers and baby food..." My knees were like water: the envelope contained the equivalent of my 10-months' rent. Where do I sign? Jelena smiled and said: "C'mon, don't worry... You can't do anything if you don't trust people..."

II

We bought the diapers all right, the citizens are bringing in a lot of stuff, food, clothing... We're getting help from taxi drivers, truck owners. Aleksandar from Food for Life, a humanitarian group with the Hare Krishna, calls to offer their van to go to the rescue of a refugee convoy that got stuck in Pavlovića Cuprija. I'm happy, they have this van and they cooked this huge brothel for the refugees. Vesna from OXFAM calls to ask if she could bring along an Italian reporter. They've bought lots of hygiene stuffs, socks, underwear...

We're on our way! Suddenly, we're stopping... Somewhere in Vojvodina. I've no idea what's going on. Just as I try to think up a plausible explanation for the Italian, we're moving again. We take a turn... We're off the main road somewhere... Another turn! As we're getting out of the van, Aleksandar says, pointing to a field of water melons, "Why don't we quickly pick up 300 of these and take them to the people there, they must be thirsty..." And here we are, the owner of the melons, Hare Krishnas in their long white robes, a perplexed Italian reporter, OXFAM representative and myself, picking up 300 water melons...

III

November 1996

The women volunteers from Group 484 are on a public bus to Belgrade after spending another weekend in Vukovar and Eastern Slavonia. Jovanka, a volunteer from Knin, begins to sing "There's no place like home..." at the top of her lungs, her party join in... The other passengers are a little confused at first, then start singing along... It's raining outside...

IV

Summer 1998

We open the Club for the Promotion of Civil Culture, but how do we get people to come to our workshops when the regime's propaganda is claiming NGOs are really cults in disguise? Tanja Marković knows a professional make-up artist. "Let's start a make-up course!" she says. Every Tuesday, we have a house full of women and girls, Brankal is hilarious... We're all sporting fancy new hairdos of Hollywood starts he compares us with... You build a civil society by building some self-respect first.

V

September 2000

Dragana Gavrilović calls to say that the police raided the campaign offices of "It Is Time" just as our volunteers were there, collecting leaflets. They seized the backpacks with campaign material, every single one of them! Whatever they did with them is a mystery to me.

VI

January 2002

The entire Group 484 goes to Zlatibor to work on our first strategic plan. Just after we've had far too many meatballs to eat for dinner, Slobodan, the husband of our team-building leader Maruška, emerges from the kitchen carrying mouth-watering sea-food platters he'd made just for us! We don't want to hurt our host's feelings and so we have our second dinner that evening. Sleeping is out of question and we stay up late into the night, singing. At daybreak, Rade recites poems by Yesenin. This team-building thing is going real well!



VII March 2005

I'm walking down Petra Kočića Street with Anna and Wiebe Blaak. I'm taking them to see the Jelena Šantić Park. They are telling me how moved they were when our young volunteers took them out to "The Question Mark" and talked passionately about the work they do with Group 484. Anna, Wiebe and I are standing in Jelena's park in Belgrade making plans for the commemoration of Group's 10th anniversary.

I'm overwhelmed with love and gratitude.

Vesna Golić



Dedicated to our beloved Jelena



Jelena Šantić, the founder of Group 484, the leading ballerina of the Belgrade National Theater, writer and humanist, was one of Serbia's leading peace activists. Since 1991, Šantić initiated a number of peace protests, set up many cooperation networks linking together local and regional non-governmental peace groups, and led refugee relief and reconciliation projects. Šantić was a member of the Belgrade Circle, helped start the European Movement in Serbia and the Centre for Anti-War Action. In 1996, she was awarded the Pax Christi International annual peace prize.

„Humanitarian work is the other side of my personality. My whole life has been an intertwinement of intuition and reason, certainty and hesitation, peacefulness and turmoil. And then, I suddenly felt the urge to help the victims of war. This humanitarian trait of mine has a certain link with art. They both bring worlds together.”

J. Šantić, Politika, 1998



1995

1996 1997 1998 1999 2000 2001 2002 2003 2004 2005

Situation in the environment.

Fleeing the Croatian military offensives “Flesh” and “Storm” in May and August 1995, respectively, some 250,000 Serbs left their homes in Croatia and crossed the border to Serbia, where more than 300,000 refugees from Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia had already found refuge. In November that year the Dayton Agreements were signed, ending armed conflicts in Bosnia-Herzegovina and providing for a peaceful reintegration of Eastern Slavonia into Croatia.

How did we react?

At Šantić's initiative, peace activists of the Center for Anti-War Action and MOST Group organised the distribution of humanitarian aid and alerted the world to the refugees' dire situation. In cooperation with peace groups in Croatia, we started searching for the missing persons and provided legal protection to civilians taken prisoner.

It is from this activist zeal and a resulting long-term relief project for 484 refugee families that **Group 484 was born.**

A brief history of our early-day activities:

August

Jelena Šantić organises a meeting of all major peace and humanitarian organisations. Participants agree to launch a comprehensive relief campaign for refugees. Volunteers intercept refugee convoys and distribute aid donated by citizens and donor groups.

September

Coordinator of the Dutch Working Committee for the Former Yugoslavia Anna Blaak and Jelena Šantić raise money for food rations, clothes and hygiene items for 1,600 refugee families in six months. OXFAM joins in. Activists of the Center for Anti-War Action and MOST Group begin to support 484 refugee families staying with relatives and friends. It is agreed to set up a separate organisation to promote the concept of self-help and enable the refugees to improve their situation and find suitable and permanent solutions for themselves. This new group was named after the 484 refugee families which depended on it.



October

Refugees from the 484 families join the Group 484 activists. First joint programmes start: office for free legal aid provided by a lawyer from Glina region, free medical check ups for the refugee kids provided by two woman doctors, one from Knin and the other from Belgrade.



November

Psycho-social workshops for refugee children and youth start. Throughout the four years of their existence, these workshops were run jointly by experts from Belgrade and their refugee colleagues.



December

New Year's Eve celebration for refugee children. Friends from the Dutch Working Committee for the Former Yugoslavia, Anna and Wiebe Blaak, come to Belgrade with generous donations for humanitarian, legal and psychosocial support programmes for refugees.

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Excerpt from the report "Working Visit" by Anna and Wiebe Blaak, December 23-30, 1995

"Visit to the workshop (children aged between 10 and 15). Jelena, Wiebe and I are invited to join the circle. We participated in the activities and the breaks for drinks and nibbles. We noticed the openness of most children. They must have felt safe within this group. The issues that were dealt with in a playful way were: from rumour to lie, the way one perceives one's enemies, seemingly inextricable knots."

(Workshop for 14-18 year olds)

»Then I talked about our visit as representative of Stichting Werkcomite vm Joegoslavie Steenwijk e.o. They were very curious about the opinion of the people in the Netherlands on the Balkan war.«

»On our return we found the staff members of Project 484 waiting for us to spend the last evening of our visit together. We went over our working visit once more; the project group and ourselves found that the visit had been very useful, plan were made and areas of special attention decided upon. The main activities of the SWJS for the near future will concentrate on supporting Project 484.«



Many thanks to Anna, Wiebe and all our dear friends from the Netherlands for their support to our work all these years.

The first advocacy effort is a big success – student refugees' request for more favorable admission quotas for college campuses is approved.

»To the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Serbia,
Students' Standards Office
Attn. Mr. Božidar Jeličić, Deputy Minister

... All this considered, we urge you, as the representative of the Ministry, to reconsider your decision on the income-based quota for students from refugee households. We are hereby not seeking a privileged position in relation to other students of the Belgrade University...

We demand equal opportunities for all students of the Belgrade University, of which we too are a part. We ask you to give us the opportunity to get on with our studies and, in the future, use our knowledge to be of use to our families and our people...

Six points is roughly half way on the ten-point scale used to evaluate a candidate's financial status. Neither too much nor too little!...

The Initiative Board of student refugees from RSK (Republic of Srpska Krajina), Belgrade, October 12, 1995.«

1995

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How did our organisation grow?

In the early days, Group 484 was a subdivision of the Center for Anti-War Action and most of its activists were members of NGO MOST. The group's membership grew with the arrival of 484 refugee families.

With Jelena Šantić at the head, this group of activists, most of them psychologists, decided to offer support for 400 families whom the relief effort was bypassing because they were staying in private homes. They believed in the refugees' strength to solve their problems on their own. The support should help them activate and use that strength. In addition to information about their financial and health status, the interviews they conducted with the refugees gave a picture of their education and skills, professions and hobbies, and special needs. People with leader and activist skills were identified. The refugees were shown where to go for food rations and hygiene items. They learned basic facts about Belgrade, main relief organisations and institutions, and were encouraged to personally contribute to refugee orientation programmes.



Reportage: "Small Group, Big Deeds"

Excerpt: When I was in France, the Netherlands and Germany, I realised how powerful citizen activism can be. All over the world small groups of people do humanitarian work, and it's no news. I realised that no state is capable of handling everything on its own, and our country is no exception. So one day we come up with this idea to select 400 families, for that was all we could afford, and work with them. A few days later, this number went up to 484 families turning to us for help. We registered as Group 484 and have been operating under this name ever since, Jelena explains."

The information we now had suggested that many interviewees were quite keen on doing something to help their fellow refugees. They made a team of lawyers, doctors, teachers, psychologists, students and craftsmen among them who needed assistance to start new businesses.

On the last day of the interviews, a much larger crowd than we could handle came to us to tell their story. We had to leave it at number 484.

Inspired by the families, the interviewers set up a group to develop self-help solutions for refugees. Deciding on its name during a meeting, Dijana Plut said half-jokingly: "Let's give it some kind of a code name, like 007. Let's call it 484."

Ballet dancer and peace activist Jelena Šantić began her humanitarian work already in 1991, as one of the founders of Serbia's peace movement. She believed in the concept of quick response and well-targeted assistance. At the same time, she knew that it was necessary to deal with the causes of armed conflicts, end the war and rebuild confidence among people. Jelena's way of tackling the root causes and at the same time dealing with consequences while laying the basis for a stable peace became a hallmark of Group 484, which she led until March 2000.

Situation in the environment.

The agreement on peaceful reintegration of Eastern Slavonia enters its initial phase. The agreement specified the way Croatia would regain full control over the region previously held by the Serbs and with a predominantly Serbian population, with the help of an interim UN administration over a period of 12 to 24 months. Out of the region's population of 160,000, roughly 70,000 were refugees from other parts of Croatia.

How did we react?

We launched the project **“Rebuilding Confidence in Eastern Slavonia, Baranja and Western Srem”**. Believing that the population of these regions did not have to become refugees, and that no one better than those who could not avoid that fate could help them, we formed volunteer support groups from 484 refugee families for three areas: Vukovar, Ilok and the villages around Vukovar (Sotin, Tovarnik, Mikluševci, Čakovci, Ilača, and Markušica). The project relied on our intense cooperation with peace groups from Serbia, Croatia and its part of Eastern Slavonia.

The volunteers' first task was to get in touch with the local authorities and individuals who believed in democratic values and peace, and get their support for setting up various civil groups. They organised children's and handicraft workshops, youth and women clubs, workshops on nonviolence and tolerance. They also organised panel discussions and individual legal counseling, informed the population about the substance of the peace agreement, about their rights and obligations towards Croatia and Serbia, and provided legal assistance and advice. They provided humanitarian aid and counselling for people suffering from post-traumatic stress, and parties and social events for children and young people.



Volunteers received a warm welcome on the ground. Local people aired their fears of removal with their refugee friends during emotional sessions every Thursday and Friday. The rest of the week the volunteers spent in Belgrade working with refugees from the 484 families.

To ensure that the project would outlive the outgoing UN administration, the volunteers recruited and trained a team of young people who had decided to stay in the region. The Days of Culture of Peace, a traditional annual event organised by the Centre for Peace, Nonviolence and Human Rights from Osijek, were a perfect occasion to hand the Group 484's project over to our Croatian colleagues, in summer 1997.

“Coordination for Eastern Slavonia, Baranja and Western Srem”, a network of peace groups from Croatia and Serbia, crowned the project. The network's aim was to rebuild confidence in a joint effort aimed at promoting protection of human rights, dignity and safety of every citizen, and safe return of all the displaced persons and refugees. The network members met in the town of Mohač in Hungary, near the borders of Serbia and Croatia. Germany and the Netherlands, through Die Schewe Foundation, supported the project. The place in Mohač where the activists met was called the Danube Peace Bridge.

This project made it possible for many to reestablish links with their maiden states and decide about their future with a sense of self-confidence and faith in human solidarity.

Other members of the network included: Society for Peace and Tolerance, Bačka Palanka; Peace Group, Sombor; Peace Initiative, Baranja; Antiwar Campaign Croatia, Zagreb; Center for Peace, Nonviolence and Human Rights, Osijek; Action Group of the Young, Osijek; Small Step – Center for the Culture of Peace and Nonviolence, Zagreb; MIRamiDA, Association for Human Rights, Peace and Nonviolence, Daruvar; Dalmatian Solidarity Committee, Split; Volunteer Project, Pakrac; HOMO, Pula.



1995 **1996** 1997 1998 1999 2000 2001 2002 2003 2004 2005

Throughout the year, we continued to supply **humanitarian, psychosocial and legal aid to the refugees**. We started a **hand-weaving workshop for women refugees**, helping them to make income from the sales of the hand-made products.

We opened and equipped a crafts workshop, and helped the craftsmen from the 484 families start their own businesses.

How did our organisation grow?

In March 1996, we get our own premises in Tetovska Street. OXFAM and the Working Committee for the Former Yugoslavia provide the necessary office equipment. Dubravka Velat and Anna Blaak train our activists in management skills, writing project proposals and activity development. Vesna Petrović and Goran Svilanović provide training in human rights. Jelena Vlajković runs seminars on psychosocial work with refugees, and Danijela Petrović and Dragana Ilić teach nonviolent conflict resolution.



Situation in the environment.

The number of refugees from Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina residing in Serbia now exceeds 500,000. The safety situation in Croatia is bleak, while the conditions for repatriation in Bosnia-Herzegovina are slightly more favourable. In July 1997, the UN troops leave Eastern Slavonia, sending another 30,000 refugees over the border to Serbia.

Serbia is exhausted from economic sanctions, isolation and deep political cleavages. After a surprisingly good turnout at the local elections in November 1996 for the Zajedno Coalition, the authorities annulled the results of the vote in the municipalities carried by the opposition, stating alleged procedural flaws. During 88 days of massive demonstrations that followed in Belgrade and other Serbian towns, the citizens demanded that their electoral will, political liberties and civil rights be respected. The authorities finally accepted the original election results.

How did we react?

We invite Croatian peace activists to come visit the refugees. At public panel discussions, the refugees get first-hand information about the situation in their place of origin and repatriation programmes.

Free legal aid office is working regularly.

Thanks to Dutch and French donations, fresh quantities of **humanitarian aid** are regularly supplied to approximately 600 refugee families. The refugees are helping out, too.

In the first half of the year, **volunteers in Eastern Slavonia** prepare to leave. They help set up independent youth groups and gradually delegate their duties to their Croatian counterparts.

Dedicated to helping the refugees regain control over their lives, we enhanced the **psychosocial programme** by organising workshops for pre-school and school children, high-school and college students, parents with children with special needs, and their families.

Guided by the motto "Your Life Is In Your Hands", we designed the workshops following the carefully collected information about the refugees' needs. Mediators worked in pairs consisting of one expert from Belgrade and one recruited from among the refugees.

The first workshops were dealing with handling post-traumatic stress and finding one's way in changed living conditions. Later on, the focus was on nonviolent conflict resolution, children's and human rights; we offered courses in quick learning techniques, computers and the English language. We organised picnics, museum tours, gave away theatre and movie tickets, and visited summer and winter resorts.





The establishment of the camp for the children of refugees and the children from poor families living in Germany was the crown of our cooperation with Hans Spoelstra, a social worker and dedicated peace activist from Berlin. The camp was run by Group 484's activists, refugees and Hans' associates, previously his protégées in an aid programme for adolescents with socialisation problems.



Group 484's offices were in a neighborhood with a large Roma population and Jelena made friends with them. This relationship resulted in a lasting cooperation between Group 484 and the association of Roma families. After the tragic event of October 1997, when a group of skinheads beat to death a Roma boy in Belgrade, Jelena immediately went to meet with the Roma activists. With them, the Humanitarian Law Center and other non-governmental organisations we organised demonstrations in Belgrade. In our offices, the refugees and the Roma together made yellow armbands which the Roma wore during the demonstrations. We secured financial support for the family of the slain boy.

How did our organization grow?

We learned skills which helped us be of more use to our beneficiaries – management, writing project proposals, reporting, evaluation and monitoring, holding meetings... In July 1997, we drafted our first strategic plan. After analysing the situation in the environment, we decided that our focus should shift to projects promoting civil-society values – a way to gradually change the environment in which the refugees lived. The Club for the Promotion of Civil Culture was born.



The situation in the environment.

The European Court for Human Rights is established. In Kosovo, armed conflict erupts between the Albanian armed groups and Serbian security forces, leading to grave breaches of humanitarian law and atrocities against civilians.

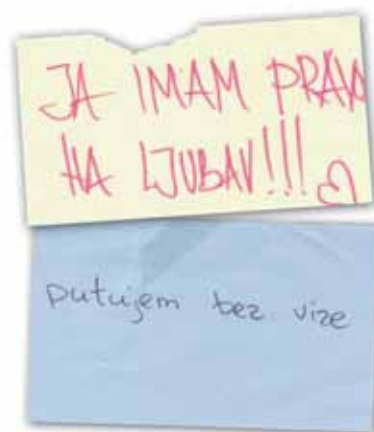
How did we react?

We joined other non-governmental groups in **organising human-rights events and appealed to the government to prevent war in Kosovo and avoid the bombing of Serbia and Montenegro**. In May, a conference of non-governmental organisations in Kragujevac, organised by Jelena Santić, urges the Serbian leadership to put an end to the conflicts in Kosovo. A body formed to coordinate the work of all NGOs demanding a peaceful settlement in Kosovo later evolved into a broad network of organisations, with Group 484 as its information centre.

We join the alliance of non-governmental organisations commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. With the event entitled **“Right to a Dignified Life in Displacement”**, Group 484 reminded the public of the refugees' rights, in particular the right to choose their own future. In August that year, we organised a series of events marking the anniversary of the arrival of the refugees from Krajina: get-togethers with activists from Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, street sales of products manufactured in workshops for refugees, the event “I Have the Right To...”

We founded the **“Club for the Promotion of Civil Culture”** as a framework for including the refugees in the processes of making a civil society in Serbia. Courses and workshops dealt with building up own activist potentials, learning about human rights and adopting social skills.

We continued to provide **humanitarian, economic, and psychosocial support** to more than 600 refugee families. We gave the women refugees from the hand weaving workshop looms to encourage their economic independence. We helped a hair dresser and a dentist start own businesses. Our friends from the Netherlands had the hair salon and the dentist's rooms fully equipped. Throughout the year, other refugees could use their services free of charge.



1995 1996 1997 **1998** 1999 2000 2001 2002 2003 2004 2005

Now more and more local people join our psychosocial workshops. We took a group of refugee children with special needs to a summer camp.

We also supported **the establishment of the Democratic Roma Association** and its section **the Roma women's group Peja** – today one of the most renowned Roma organisations in the country.

How did our organisation grow?

New programmes called for a new internal structure of Group 484, in compliance with our profile of a typical activist group. After opening the Club for the Promotion of Civil Culture and continuing to work with refugees, the cornerstone of our operations were the Programme for refugees and the Programme for the Development of Civil Society. Both were serviced by now fully grown administrative and financial departments of Group 484.



Situation in the environment.

As fighting in Kosovo continues, the Rambouillet talks between Serbs and Albanians fail. In late March, the NATO bombing campaign against Serbia and Montenegro begins. It ended two and half months later.

After the peace agreement which ended the bombing is signed, more than 20,000 Serbs, Roma and Ashkalya leave Kosovo to seek refuge in other parts of the country. Citizens throughout the country demand political change.

How did we react?

During the bombing, Group 484 opened its offices to the citizens. We organised social gatherings in the form of workshops and offered psychological support. As the bombing campaign drew out, in an attempt to restore our everyday lives to some kind of normality, we offered language and computer courses and art workshops.

As the representative of Group 484, Jelena Šantić takes part in **the foundation of the Yugoslav Action**, a network of non-governmental organisations, labor unions and distinguished individuals, who during the bombing appealed to the government and the general public, but also to Albanian representatives, NATO, the European Union, United States and the UN to end hostilities and restore peace.

In early May 1999, with the end of the bombing still out of sight, a group of German peace activists with whom Group 484 cooperated since 1996 invites Jelena Šantić to attend demonstrations against the bombing of Serbia, in Berlin. During a week she spent there, Jelena appeared in the media, gave speeches and participated in demonstrations and gatherings, calling upon all parties to end hostilities at once.

In cooperation with the Belgrade Botanical Garden, we launched **"Summer in Belgrade"**, outdoor workshops for families with children who remained in the city for the post-bombing summer.



We organised the distribution of **humanitarian aid** to the most vulnerable citizens of Belgrade and Kragujevac.

The incoming wave of **displaced families from Kosovo** finds us fully prepared: we provide humanitarian and legal aid and give them all the information they need. Following the formation of the first collective centers around Belgrade, we form a team which in the coming years helps children to get integrated in the new environment and cope with their obligations at school; refers young people and adults to useful institutions and groups, help families to deal with the stress caused by war and life in displacement. We start small production plants, offer professional training, mediate between the residents of collective centers and the local community.

As before, the psychosocial team consisted of local experts and young refugees, the previous beneficiaries of our workshops.

In response to the government's treatment of political opponents, we set up **the "Volunteers' Center for the Protection of Human Rights"**. In cooperation with the Humanitarian Law Center and Amnesty International, we trained volunteers to report cases of human-rights violations and cover political trials. These activities continued throughout the next year.

"Dear Boss, Vale insists that from this day on you and all the rest from Group 484 stop using the words "little volunteers" when referring to us and start calling us "mega volunteers" instead. Thanks in advance.
Love, Duda&Sanja&Vale"

How did our organisation grow?

In this difficult year, we took care of each other: we gathered during the raids, kept record of where everybody was, and strengthening solidarity among ourselves. After the bombing, we set up a relief team for the IDPs from Kosovo, consisting of many of our former beneficiaries. This proved us that the models of self-organisation we developed did work, and that cooperation, solidarity and support, the main values of Group 484, were thriving.



Situation in the environment.

The year 2000 marks the victory of the Democratic Opposition of Serbia (DOS). After the early federal presidential elections and the regular elections for federal parliament, in September and October 2000, president of FRY Slobodan Milošević stepped down after massive civil protests. The Democratic Opposition of Serbia won the majority of seats in the federal legislature and held power on the local level. The previous regime's refusal to accept the election results led to massive protests and strikes. Two days after the huge demonstrations in Belgrade on October 5, when the protesters seized the Federal Parliament and the national television buildings, Milošević accepted electoral defeat. "Overshadowed" by these events was the passing of the UN Millennium Goals.

How did we react?

In an effort **to galvanise the citizens, especially young people, to vote on September 24**, we joined other NGOs in the campaigns "It Is Time" and "Get Up, Stand Up".

The year 2000 was a very busy year for **Group 484's volunteer center**. Its members followed several trials which sent a strong political message to the public, and reported from them.

In September, we launch the project "**ABC of Democracy**", with the idea to encourage young people to become active in their local communities and contribute to democratic changes. Seminars for teachers, future trainers in Belgrade, Obrenovac and Arandjelovac mark the start of a long-term programme which will become the cornerstone of our work with young people in the following years. The activities started simultaneously in 42 towns and 53 schools in Serbia.



The Club for the Promotion of Civil Society is still active. Professionals from a variety of fields – psychologists, writers, actors, physicians – are encouraged to submit projects and implement them as part of the Club's activities. Our main focus is on the communication workshops. The Psychocode team runs the Art of Parenthood. The Film Debate Club is established.



Apart from the activities in support of the democratic changes, our focus is still firmly on the most vulnerable groups – **the families displaced from Kosovo**. The residents of collective centers get regular supplies of medicine, school kits, sporting goods. But also some soul food: we sang along and sporting goods. But also some soul food: we sang along and organised workshops for them, discussed family problems with the adults over a cup of tea or coffee, organised professional education, helped the men and women find jobs, provided counseling and other forms of help in the times of crisis. A group of volunteers from Japan took part in humanitarian and psychosocial relief activities.

We continue to provide support for the **children and young people with special needs**. A well-trained professional team runs the programme of social inclusion of this sensitive group.

1995 1996 1997 1998 1999 **2000** 2001 2002 2003 2004 2005

How did our organisation grow?

After the death of Jelena Šantić, who was our inspiration and leader for five years, we asked ourselves if we can and want to continue. We realized right away how well Jelena had equipped us with a vision and energy, and the dilemma was gone. Our annual assembly passed amendments to the Statute and modified the Group's core management structure. We decided to draw a clear line between the administration and the executive bodies. The new management now consisted of executive director and two deputy directors. We elected new members of the executive board. This way we improved the decision-making process and made it compliant with our potentials now that Jelena was gone.

On March 18 we said goodbye to our Jelena. Our last time together was after a street action involving putting up posters for resistance group "Otpor", her favorite. She said: "Changes are on their way, I can sense it, they're just one last big push away, but we must be careful not to put innocent people's lives at risk."

On March 23, 2000 Group 484 received a letter from Berlin: "Group 485 has been founded in Berlin!" Many thanks to our Hans Spoelstra and all our dear friends from Berlin!



Situation in the environment.

The democratic changes in the country and the creation of conditions for restoring relations with the neighbors. The new government of Prime Minister Zoran Đinđić takes office in January. FRY is readmitted into the UN and the OSCE. The safety situation in Kosovo still does not allow the return of ethnic minority groups.

George W. Bush becomes president of the United States. New York and Washington are targets of terrorist attacks on September 11.

How did we react?

Through a series of projects, we continued to support the democratic changes and the development of an open and tolerant society.

At **the Club for the Promotion of Civil Society** we organise a cycle of panel discussions entitled "Identity", and a series of seminars on communication and other social skills. We use art forms – comics and documentaries most of all – as a way to teach social changes.

Together with a group of philosophers, sociologists and political analysts we organise forums to discuss and critically examine concepts of civil society.

The ABC of Democracy, consisting of two main activity lines, runs in 42 towns in Serbia. "Don't get angry!" emphasises local activism, while "Richness of Diversity" focuses on the development of good neighbourly relations in multicultural communities.

We publish "Institute of Awakening", a collection of stories by high-school students, an extraordinary testimony of the times in which their generation grew up.



We develop our first programmes for senior citizens. Under the roof of Group 484, we open **a senior citizens' club** and encourage the members to actively help their peers by visiting old-age homes, and providing humanitarian and medical aid to those staying in collective centers. They do a research on the status of Belgrade's elderly and take part in environmental projects.

We launch the **"Open Door"**, a project promoting cooperation and cultural exchange between young people from the former Yugoslavia. The project included an award contest and the exhibition of photographs and briefer literary forms by young participants from Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Slovenia, Macedonia and Serbia and Montenegro.



The project **“Road to Nonviolence”** covered Pančevo, Kragujevac and Belgrade. We worked with groups of children from different ethnic and linguistic backgrounds -- Roma, Serb, Ashkali, Hungarian, Slovak, Romanian, Jewish and Croatian – with the goal to find a common language and understand each other.

We continued the programme for children and adolescents with special needs, called **“Seventh Continent – The Island of Noble Growing Up”**. The beneficiaries included refugees, displaced persons, as well as children from the local community. Our primary thrust are the children with special needs, but we have more and more of their peers from the local community coming to us. We work together on mutual understanding and acceptance.



The UN OHCHR Belgrade office asked us to organise a visit of the UN Secretary-General's special envoy for human rights Mr. José Cutileiro to the collective center in Resnik, where the IDPs from Kosovo were staying. It was a very successful visit thanks to our good cooperation with the IDPs over the years. We briefed them on describing their everyday problems in plain words. Deeply moved by their stories, Mr. Cutileiro included their grievances in his report and took these issues directly before Serbia's top government officials



Parallel to **direct aid** to refugees and the displaced families – humanitarian, information and psychosocial – we now focus on **advocating for a durable solution for these groups**. We do this together with our colleagues from other former Yugoslav republics.

We join the South East European Refugee Assistance Network – SEE RAN, consisting of 24 non-governmental organisations providing aid to refugees in Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia and Serbian and Montenegro. Together, we develop projects **“Triangle – Repatriation in Croatia, Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina”**, and a **“Comprehensive Process of Advocacy on Legal Refugee and IDP Issues”**.

“Triangle” provided informational and legal support to the refugees returning to Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. It also helped us identify the problems these people were facing and make a strong case for the refugees' right to choose their place of residence. A study we conducted in cooperation with the Balkan Human-Rights Network compared the status of refugees and displaced persons, existing laws and their application in all the countries in the region.

Our position of refugee rights advocacy was further strengthened by our full membership in the European Council on Refugees and Exiles, a network of 74 refugee NGOs from 29 countries.

How did our organisation grow?

We realised that our staff of 30 gave 30 different answers to the question “Who are we?” We had to stop there and think who we are and what we want, and agree on a common vision. Our thanks go to Vesna Cipruš, whose words worked as an eye-opener: “You're trying to get to the Moon in a paper plane”, she said. She bravely led us through the process of rediscovering our identity and building a “modern space ship”. That was the year of intense strategic planning and growth which laid the foundations for a professional organisation in the process of learning.



Situation in the environment.

The governments of Serbia and Montenegro agree to form a state union of Serbia and Montenegro on March 14. The constitution of the new state took more than expected and its admission to the Council of Europe had to be postponed. Presidential elections in Serbia fail due to a turnout below the legal threshold of a simple majority of registered voters. The disagreements between the Democratic Party and the Democratic Party of Serbia deepen, resulting in the Democratic Party leaving the ruling coalition. On February 13, the federal parliament passes the Law on the Protection of Rights and Freedoms of National Minorities. Serbian government adopts the national strategy for the resolution of the problems of refugees and IDPs and starts mapping out a national anti-poverty strategy.

How did we react?

In the year of the passing of national strategies concerning our beneficiaries we concentrated our efforts on becoming part of the strategy-making process by using various **advocacy skills**.

Through the project “**Informational Support to IDPs**”, we encouraged the displaced people to seek their rights by acquainting them with the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement and advocacy channels to implement these principles.



As part of the project “**Comprehensive Process of Advocacy on Legal Refugee and IDP Issues**”, based on the findings of the comparative study of the status of refugees and IDPs and the relevant laws, all states in the region held national conferences dedicated to all the important aspects of the problem of forced migrations, identified the problems and proposed solutions. In Serbia, we held a national conference entitled “Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons Between Rights and Reality” and helped prepare and participated in the regional conference “Refugees: A Human-Rights Challenge” in Ohrid, Macedonia. These conferences resulted in the publication of recommendations for improving the status of refugees and IDPs, distributed to all the relevant institutions and organizations.

We reacted to the first draft of the **Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper**. Feeling that the draft did not pay enough attention to refugees and IDPs as a particularly vulnerable and underprivileged group, we collected all the available data about their status in the “Study on Poverty of Refugees and IDPs”. Through the Civil Society **Advisory Board** we informed the government about the refugees’ poor financial standing and possible ways of reducing poverty.

Apart from advocating for the refugees’ cause, we **continue to work directly with the refugees and IDPs** by providing humanitarian, informational, legal and psychosocial aid.

In an effort to help the refugees decide whether to go home (to Croatia) or stay (in Serbia), give them all the options and, at the same time, inform the general public about their situation, we made “**Homecoming**”, a documentary produced by Kvadrat Production.



“Homecoming”, a film by Group 484
Serbia and Montenegro
Belgrade Film Festival FEST

Duration: 60 min

Directed by: Svetlana and Zoran Popović

Synopsis: After seven years in exile, the Borota family returns to their home in Croatia. For the first time after the war they reunite with relatives. This intimate story is told through the details of a personal drama with discrete echoes of a huge tragedy of more than 250,000 Serbs who had to leave their homes in Croatia during the 1995 war operations. Their story tells of the man's universal need to have a home. After losing their home, they make a new one, but they never stop longing for the old place. When they are finally back, they feel uprooted and unsafe.

Showing March 7 at 3.30 p.m.

The building of an open and tolerant society as a prerequisite for the respect for the rights of refugees and the internally displaced persons remained the main focus of the Club for the Promotion of Civil Society and our other projects, including “Don't Get Angry! – the Richness of Diversity”, “The Road to Nonviolence”, “Open Door”, “The Seventh Continent – the Planet of Noble Growing”.

The Club for the Promotion of Civil Society continued to organise panel discussions on identity, with seminars and workshops for young people. In the Chit-Chat Club, we talked about feminist issues, poverty, globalization, migrations. Students from 10 Belgrade high-schools made fun quizzes about European history and culture, with music and dancing. We ran level-one training in philosophical research in education, an international programme for high-school teachers. The Centre for Philosophy For Children was established as a result of this training.

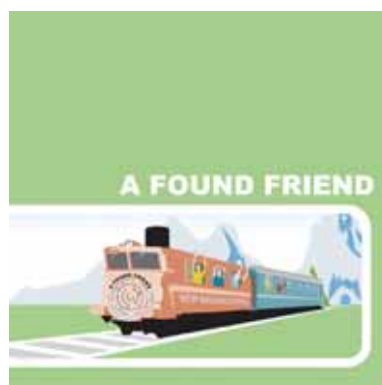
The project “**Don't Get Angry! – Richness of Diversity**” offered new workshops, camps, seminars, and gatherings throughout Serbia. This nationwide school of democracy for young people existed in Užice, Novi Pazar, Kragujevac, Vranje, Kruševac, Pančevo, Tutin, Sjenica... and many other towns. Carska Bara, Zlatibor, Goč, Stara Planina, and Vrujci became centers of learning about the basic notions of democracy for the generations born in the eighties. “My Book Alone”, co-authored by young participants and a team of professionals from the publishing business, is a result of this project.

In addition to this, we developed two projects:

“**This Is Me, And Who Are You?**” allowed young people to learn about new cultures and take pictures of the things they see. This resulted in “About Ourselves and Others”, a traveling exhibition showing the ethnic and cultural diversity of five multicultural cities: Belgrade, Subotica, Novi Pazar, Preševo and Užice.



Our experience in working with young people proved valuable in **“A Found Friend”**, a project with four partner organisations from the region. It covered towns in Southern Serbia, Kosovo, Montenegro, Macedonia and Albania. We brought together a group of high-school teachers for local activities and workshops on the promotion of peaceful and tolerant co-life, and trained them to pass on the knowledge to their students.



How did our organisation grow?

Strategic planning began to bear fruit. We made a clear strategic plan for the period 2002-2007, and an action plan for 2002. We created a team to monitor their implementation. We set up the Team for Social Measures and Policies and introduced a management team of six – executive director, deputy director, financial manager, office manager and two programme coordinators – believing that four eyes (or in this case 14, to be exact) will see better than two. Our results were visibly improved thanks to these changes.

Eileen Hoffman, an American expert in financial and organisational systems management, volunteered in Group 484 for six months. We thank Eileen for her support!

Situation in the environment.

In the aftermath of the March 12 assassination of Prime Minister Đinđić and the introduction of the state of emergency, Serbia was engulfed in political instability and economic uncertainty. The drafting and passing the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) was slowed down. The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia ceased to exist, and the new State Union of Serbia and Montenegro was admitted to the membership of the Council of Europe.

How did we react?

Our reformist enthusiasm never faded and we worked hard to pass some of it on to the decision-makers and those responsible for keeping the country firmly on the “path to Europe”. We owed it to our beneficiaries.

Our advocacy efforts focused on:

Inclusion of refugees and IDPs in the PRSP. We got the decision-makers to pay attention to problem of poverty among these two groups and include our recommendations in the PRSP. Its second draft provided substantial aid funds for underprivileged refugees and IDPs – more than EUR 138 million over a period of three years.

“Believe me, in my experience it is very unusual to see an advocacy group achieve as much as you have, along with us, on this project. Estimates suggest that refugees make around 18% of the total number of the country's poor, and they are allocated 20% of the budget funds. This is thanks to all the round tables, consultations and, if you wish, pressure. You should be pleased with what you have accomplished.” S. Cvejić, a Strategy expert.

Empowering Internally Displaced Persons for Advocacy for Their Rights and Implementation of UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement. In consultation and cooperation with the key international refugee-assisting agencies and organisations – UNHCR, UNHCHR, UN OCHA, DRC and NRC – we encouraged IDPs and the local governments to jointly work out solutions to the problems of forced migrants in their respective communities. We set up municipal coordination groups consisting of all the major local community actors in five Serbian counties, charged with identifying and solving the problems of the displaced persons on the local level.



Many external stakeholders (donors, international organisations) believed that Group 484 had promoted partnership on the local level, particularly related to finding solutions for IDPs, which include both NGOs and the local authorities. This has set new standards of work for NGOs. As a result of their work, some local authorities now knew much more about the work of NGOs and had enough confidence to use them as partners in solving the problems of people and working with them.” (Evaluators Marina Škorić Prodanović and Dragan Marković)

Civil education for a life in a civil society. As members of the Ministry of Education's task group for designing civil-education curricula for junior years of high-school, we managed to incorporate some of our experience into the school system. The second edition of our "Critical Glossary of Civil-Society" attracted the attention of the representatives of higher-education institutions, who called it a necessary reference book for the coming generations.



The following recommendations and books were the cornerstone of our advocacy effort:

- Report on Rights of Refugees, IDPs and Asylum-Seekers (included in the 2003 annual report of the Center for Human Rights), Danilo Rakić, 2003
- Study on Poverty of Refugees and IDPs, Elina Multanen, 2003
- Policy Recommendation For Inclusion of IDPs and Refugees into Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, Elina Multanen, 2003
- Country Report for 2002 for ECRE, Elina Multanen, 2003
- Case Study About Inclusion of Refugees and IDPs into PRSP, Danilo Vuković, 2003.

Apart from putting heat on decision-makers, we also:

Provided direct psychosocial, legal and informational support to refugees and internally displaced families. The beneficiaries of psychosocial support included 310 displaced families from eight collective centres around Belgrade, as well as the local communities hosting the centres and 75 refugee and displaced children with special needs.

Our programmes of individual informational and legal counseling, visits to collective centers, informative panels and radio programmes covered some 4,000 refugees and IDPs, most of them in Serbia and some in Montenegro.

Our youth programmes Club for the Promotion of Civil Society, "Don't Get Angry! – Richness of Diversity", "This Is Me, And Who Are You?" and "A Found Friend" continued to **empower young people to participate fully in building a civil society.**



Participants' comments on the panel discussion on democracy:

"I never thought it could be so interesting."

"This is the first time I ever really thought about the concept of democracy we've all been talking about all the time."

"I didn't realise you could talk about democracy and not use all the big words."

We developed a new project:

“The Healing Cinema”, with the goal to raise the awareness of young people and the entire local community of the needs of their fellow citizens with mental and physical disabilities, in 10 cities in Serbia.



Through quizzes, workshops, debates, panel discussions, local actions and art – photography, film, painting, drama and literary forms – we educated some 18,000 young people in 25 towns in Serbia about the basic values of the civil society, making them more open to change and diversity. Also, they had the opportunity to meet and make friends with their peers from Albania, Montenegro, Kosovo and Macedonia.



How did our organisation grow?

Most of our energy went into setting up the Policy and Advocacy Team, and adding clout to our projects by introducing elements of advocacy.

Our great Finnish friend and dedicated associate Elina Multanen, who spent two years with us, laid the foundations for our entire policy and advocacy activities, and started the Team. Jale Sultanli of Azerbaijan later further developed the unit. Many thanks to both!

We introduced matrix organisational structure, allowing our staff to know the status of every project activity at any time, and to better coordinate work between them.



Situation in the environment.

Following the enlargement of the European Union, Serbia became its immediate neighbour. This created the opportunity for new investments in the stabilization and democratization of the region, but also a potential risk of asylum seekers stopping in Serbia under a "safe third country" concept. At the same time, economic growth figures went down, unemployment figures went up, investment levels and competitiveness were low, private sector and an unreformed public sector were stagnating and the state institutions and administration were too weak.

How did we react?

We identified two priority areas: "poverty" and "building the community's capacities for understanding the phenomenon of forced migrations, and dealing with it".

Unfortunately, the new government had not implemented the **PRSP**. We used focus groups and panel discussions to advocate for the implementation of measures outlined in the PRSP in the current activities of the government, and educated the beneficiaries about the scope and substance of PRSP and the need for a joint advocacy effort to see it carried through. We published two documents, "Human-Rights Indicators for Monitoring of PRSP Measure" and "Economic Policy of the Government of Serbia and PRSP".

We encouraged young people to participate in the process of implementation of the PRSP in Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina through the project "The Youth and Poverty".

““

"Poverty is a consequence of your inability to face the problems and deal with them."
(A girl from Kikinda)

Realising that we are now on the edge of the European Union with no capacity to deal with the problems of controlling migration flows, we started a number of capacity-building activities.

We prepared the ground for "**School of Migrations**" and got together a group of experts in different fields: a philosopher, anthropologist, historian, lawyer, sociologist, demographer and psychologist. We published two papers on migrations, the *Study on Life in Displacement* and *Multidisciplinary Approach to Migrations*. The authors presented their papers to the public at seven panel discussions. We organised one seminar on migrations and established cooperation with the Faculty of Political Science.



i

Ninety percent of the young people who participated in the seminar on migrations said they would like to see the subject of migrations included in regular studies, while 95% said they would gladly inform their colleagues at the faculty about the problem of migrants and migrations.

We contributed to the elaboration of first draft of the **Asylum Law** and participated in a round table about it.

We organised six seminars and a conference entitled **“Protection of Women and Children in Displacement From Sexual and Gender-Based Violence”** in order to draw the attention of people working with refugees and IDPs to this type of violence and teach them to recognise it and take adequate and timely action. The conference brought together 113 representatives of local and international NGOs, UN agencies (UNHCR and UNDP), state institutions and media.



We made the following recommendation and papers:

- Harmonization of the EU Asylum System – Relevance and Impact of EU's Developments in South Eastern, Central and Eastern Europe, Tatjana Pavlović-Križanić, 2004
- In the Defense of “Fortress Europe”, Danilo Rakić, 2004
- ECRE Country Report for Serbia and Montenegro for 2003, Danilo Rakić, 2004
- Analysis of the Situation of Internally Displaced Persons from Kosovo in SaM: Law and Practice, IDP Interagency Working Group, 2004
- Human-Rights Indicators for the Monitoring of Poverty Reduction Among Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons in the Republic of Serbia, Maja Lazić, 2004
- Advocacy for the Protection of Internally Displaced Persons During Displacement in the Republic of Serbia, based on a report by Zdenka Milivojević and research conducted by Group 484, 2004
- Policy Recommendations on the Protection of Internally Displaced Persons During Displacement in the Republic of Serbia, Group 484, 2004
- Economic Policy of the Republic of Serbia and PRSP, Janko Guzijan, 2004
- Recommendations for the Improvement of Measures for Refugees and IDPs within the Framework of PRSP, Group 484, 2004

Our **direct support** to refugees and internally displaced persons continued throughout the year in the form of humanitarian, information and legal aid.

The refugees were informed that

- With the goal of improving sustainable repatriation and closing the refugee chapter in the countries of the former Yugoslavia until the end of 2006, UNHCR, OSCE and the delegations of the European Commission in Serbia and Montenegro, Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina launched a regional initiative “3x3”, also known as the Road Map.
- With the goal of establishing refugee figures and the main refugee status indicators, registration of refugees took place in Serbia Dec. 12. 2004-Jan. 1, 2005. A total of 139,483 persons turned out.
- During 2004, a total of 2,312 housing units in Croatia were returned to their exiled owners after the eviction of temporary tenants. After the Croatian government's deadline for the return of property expired at the end of 2004, another 1,197 housing units still remained occupied.

Municipal coordination groups, established the previous year as part of the project **“Empowering Internally Displaced Persons for Advocacy for Their Rights and Implementation of UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement”**, continued providing support and advocating for 3,640 beneficiaries in five municipalities in Serbia.

Young people were still in charge of the projects for building a tolerant and open society.

Continuing the **“Healing Cinema”** project, in cooperation with Caritas and the Health Ministry, they launched “Close Up, No One Looks Normal”, a campaign for destigmatisation of people with mental illnesses. During the campaign, which was running in 25 towns in Serbia, the activists distributed 6,000 posters, 500 calendars and 6,000 fliers.

Thank to the project **“Luncheon in Belgrade”**, the students from nine Belgrade high-schools studied different food habits, discovered a variety of cultural models and learned about the positive impacts of migrations.

“I found this project exiting because I could watch history pass through my kitchen, my backyard, my street, and understand the “role of my family in the world revolution”. (A high-school junior, participant in the project)

In the **“Equation With Two Knowns”**, studying the cultural heritage in their communities, young people from Belgrade, Vranje, Leskovac, Bela Crkva and Subotica learned a great deal about their fellow citizens of different ethnic and cultural background.



“At first, I was really surprised. I didn’t expect we’d go to so many different places. I thought that what I did was against my faith and even considered dropping out. But after a while, I realised that it was all OK and that I’d learn something. And now I’m very happy that I got to see the mosque and learn so much about other religions and people.”
(A project participant from Belgrade)



The project **“Good People in Bad Times”** brought together young displaced persons from Kosovo and their peers who still live there. We participated in a study on their attitudes on the return to Kosovo.

A third collection of texts **“Critical Glossary of Civil-Society”**, dealing with cultural and ethical preconditions for a civil society, is out of print. We are still active in the working team of the Ministry of Education and Sports responsible for designing the civil education curricula for senior year of high-school.

How did our organisation grow?

Changes in the environment, new programmes and new knowledge called for more internal support among the members of the Group. We tried to overcome this by developing individual work and development plans and by supervising their realisation.

In 2004, OXFAM Novib sponsored the external evaluation of Group 484’s work for the period 2000-2003. Our thanks go to evaluators Marina Škorić-Prodanović and Dragan Marković for their kind words of praise, but also for helping us see in which direction to go next.



From the evaluation we learned:

“Group 484 is widely seen as one of the most prestigious and best-positioned NGOs in Serbia today. Also, the Group is recognised on the regional level and, to some extent, international level as well. The external stakeholders described this organisation as “innovative”, “important” and open to new challenges as well as new trends. Some actors among the local civil groups, in particular those outside Belgrade, see Group 484 as the potential leader of the civil groups working with vulnerable groups in Serbia.”
“The distribution of work within Group 484 is very clear, and all the interviewed staff understand well what is expected of them. This makes Group 484 quite unique among Serbian NGOs.”
“Most external stakeholders, donors in particular, have been impressed with the Group’s internal organisational structure, noting that it is on a professional level rarely seen in the non-profit sector. A stakeholder said, “They come across as people with a plan and a clear goal ahead of them”. Another said, “Unlike many other similar organisations, with Group 484 I always know who the person to talk to is. And if I don’t know, anyone in the Group will refer me to the right person.”

At the initiative of our associate Hans Spoelstra and our sister organisation Group 485, Jelena Santić Peace Park was dedicated in Berlin, on March 22, 2004. The opening coincided with the US intervention against Iraq, symbolically underlying the purpose of the park as a place for antiwar gatherings.



Situation in the environment.

The European Union approves a positive Feasibility Study for Serbia and Montenegro on April 12. French and Dutch voters say no to the European constitution. International terrorism and its consequences shake the world. Devastating floods hit the region of Banat, leaving many homeless.

How did we react?

The Feasibility Study made us think and act towards coming closer to the European Union in the field of migrations management.

We tried to answer why we still had not joined **the White Schengen List** and what we could do in the field of migrations management to get on the List. This was the topic of the project entitled “Facilitating European Integration Process through the Introduction of European Standards in Migration Management”.

We closely analysed the status of forced migrants in our country and compared our laws in that area with respective international legislation. Our findings were published in **“2004 Annual Report: Human Rights of Refugees, Internally Displaced Persons, Returnees and Asylum-Seekers in Serbia and Montenegro”**.



We put special emphasis on the problem of repatriation of the citizens of Serbia and Montenegro from Western Europe, as laid out in **the Readmission Agreement**. The Council of Europe's estimate for 2003 was that between 50,000 and 100,000 citizens of Serbia and Montenegro would be sent back from Europe (30,000 from Germany, 12,000 from The Netherlands, and 3,000 each from Belgium, Switzerland and Luxembourg). These are likely to be conservative figures, given that the German Government alone operates with an estimated figure of 100,000 illegal immigrants from our country out of a total of 600,000 living there.

We used focus groups to learn about the views of the major players in this field. Our resulting study contained recommendations on measures to improve the rights of this group of vulnerable migrants.

"Position and Recommendations of Group 484 concerning the Return of Citizens of Serbia and Montenegro from the Countries of Western Europe" is one of the best papers on the issue published in Serbia-Montenegro that I have seen so far. I find it a valuable addition to IOM Belgrade reference library." (A representative of IOM)



In 2005, **refugee families evicted from centres** due to their planned closure needed our special attention and support. In 16 municipalities in Serbia, in cooperation with the Danish Refugee Council, together with our beneficiaries, local government officials and educational, social and health institutions we facilitated their integration in the local communities.



The floods in Banat called for urgent support to the families hardest hit by this natural disaster. We evaluated the situation on the ground by talking to local government officials and institutions, as well as the residents of the endangered municipalities of Žitište and Međa. A successful fund-raising effort which followed the publication of our disaster report resulted in the distribution of 700 packages of humanitarian aid to flood victims.



We continued the project **“Empowering Internally Displaced Persons for Advocacy for Their Rights and Implementation of UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement”** with a series of seminars for young people, reporters and associations of displaced persons dealing with access of IDPs from Kosovo to their rights.

Mr. Walter Kalin, special representative of the UN Secretary-General on the internally displaced persons, visited Serbia. In the days preceding his visit, we brought together IDP-assisting NGOs and groups and wrote a letter to Kalin outlining the main problems relating to the IDPs, which we later explained in more detail to him in person. Our recommendations, especially those concerning the right to choose a durable solution, and social and economic rights of the displaced persons, were included in Kalin's report.



In line with our commitment to the implementation of the Serbian government's *PRSP*, particularly the provisions concerning the protection from poverty of refugees and IDPs, together with UNDP **we prepared a national conference entitled “A Forgotten Crisis”**. We held regional meetings with the officials of local governments and institutions, civil groups and international refugee and IDP-assisting organisations, with the goal to raise the level of support, information, activity and cooperation between all the parties involved in anti-poverty effort.

We joined the Global Call to Action Against Poverty by organising street actions in 11 towns in Serbia and wearing white bands with a slogan “CONNECTANDSENDMESSAGE”. The campaign was further promoted at the annual Exit Music Festival. It received extensive media coverage and was supported by a number of Serbian celebrities, who handed out white bands and leaflets in the streets, with sponsorship from television station B92.



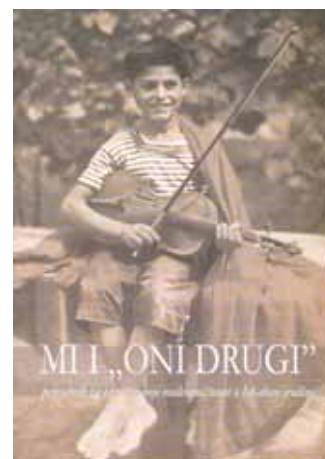
Dragoljub Đuričić and Igor Monteniger, wearing white T-shirts emblazoned with the campaign slogan “CONNECTANDSENDMESSAGE”, together with the volunteers of Group 484, talked to the citizens and gave away white wrist bands bearing the slogan. The citizens were asked the question “What makes you less poor?” and wrote down their answers on white paper bands. In less than two hours nearly 1,500 white wrist bands were distributed and almost as many paper stripes filled with messages.



The Group's volunteers continued to provide support to the IDPs in collective centres. Social-work, psychology and pedagogy students, in cooperation with our senior activists, organised a series of gatherings, workshops, visits to museums and theaters, and picnics for children and young people from collective centers Resnik and Vidikovac, near Belgrade.

Thanks to our legal team, the displaced families were issued the necessary documents. Our lawyers visited the families in the collective centres, examined their documents for them, listened to their problems and advised people what to do. Sometimes, embittered after all they had been through, they came to us for specific advice about what to do and how to do it to get the papers they needed.

Our young beneficiaries continued to meet their fellow citizens of different ethnic and cultural background through the project **“Equation with Two Knowns”**. The results of their researches were presented to the public and published under the title “Us and the Others”.



We continued educational projects on forced migrations, in the format of public panel discussions, customized seminars for specific target groups, original articles, and translations of relevant literature. Our circle of associates was growing.

“The refugee is at the door of the state, he knocks at the door of the one who can restore his legal and political status, that is, he is at the door of a sovereign host. However, it turns out that state of today is reluctant to open its door to refugees. If it does, then it is less and less in the name of universal values, less and less in the name of human rights. The resourcefulness with which the state uses means and mechanisms of pushing the refugees away as far as possible can be described as monstrous and highly anti-modern. One gets the impression that the state is terrified of the refugees. Leviathan is terrified of the people sailing in a fragile boat, lost in the deep sea and hoping that the modern-day Leviathan would not only spare their lives, but be merciful as well.”
(Ivan Milenković, editor of *Study on Life in Displacement*)



How did our organisation grow?

Our fastest growing sector that year was human resources. Our thanks go to Deloitte consultant Mr. Michael van den Berg, who did the human resourced audit for us. Apart from impeccable professionalism he showed keen personal interest and respect for our work.

“Group 484: How would you describe Group 484’s human resources and what are your impressions about us?”

Michael van den Berg: I am very impressed with what you’ve achieved in such a short period of time. A lot of energy, a lot of enthusiasm is here. I was interested to learn about what you are doing for this society, to listen about your problems and see what solutions you propose, how you’re fighting and trying to build something for these people here. I’d say that the human resources of Group 484 – financial, legal or PR sectors, for instance – grew along with the organisation. You feel strongly about it and you have constantly been introducing improvements, smaller or bigger, and changes... In my view, it is a good thing to do. You turn to the outside world for ideas, see it changing and realise that you too must change.”



This year, **our volunteers** made us proud, too. With the support of the Group 484’s coordinators, they set up a team, created a database and trained some 40 volunteers. They supported almost all Group’s actions, designed and carried out their activities and participated in international youth exchange programmes.

They summed up their experience in the “Local Group Team Leader’s Manual”, to be published along with this brochure.

Thank you, volunteers, for your support and understanding!

Excerpt from the “Manual”:

“What would you be doing if you weren’t reading this manual? Probably the same as most people your age, wasting precious time in front of a TV or some other high-tech wonder or, at worst, hanging out in front of a neighbourhood convenience store.

It takes years to learn to value minutes. Don’t let this realisation come TOO LATE!

“Nothing’s ever happening, and I’m bursting with energy” is a good excuse but, to quote uncle William Shakespeare, the world is as interesting as we are curious. The world is a stage on which we all play our roles.

Stop being an extra! Do not accept minor roles! Be the leading actor and write your own script! Make every day count and make good use of your time.”



1995 1996 1997 1998 1999 2000 2001 2002 2003 2004 **2005**

This year another park, this time in the Belgrade neighborhood of Neimar, was named after Jelena Šantić. Our German friend Hans Spoelstra, who named the park in Berlin, together with his protégées made a beautiful gift to its Belgrade namesake: Jelena's name in graffiti and two symbols of the bond between two cities, Berlin's TV tower and Belgrade's city gate.

Our thanks go to the City Commission on Street Names, the municipality of Vračar and mayor Ms. Milena Milošević, the City Green Areas Division and all local residents for helping this park become a gathering place for the people of good will.



Results (excerpts from the external evaluation of Group 484)

Beneficiaries

In general, beneficiaries were very pleased with the activities of Group 484 and felt they had received a number of personal gains and benefits, such as increased knowledge of their own rights. Many felt more accepted in their environments and empowered to take concrete steps in addressing some of their problems.

One beneficiary mentioned that „Group 484 did not resolve my personal problem, but through their serious approach they quickly overcame my initial scepticism about some of the facilitators (their young age, their strange hairdos).”

Internally displaced persons from Kosovo stated that the greatest impact was the knowledge they now had about the rights of displaced persons (according to the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement) and the resulting establishment of alliances between NGOs, IDPs and local authorities for the provision of improved services for IDPs. For example, in some municipalities, local employment offices have promised to include IDPs in skills training and development for unemployed persons.

Young people tended to point out that the greatest impact was a decrease in conservative attitudes of their local environments, particularly the traditional approaches of their professors. Many young people were empowered to carry out a local action and started thinking more about social or environmental problems they faced. As a result, some youth have registered local organisations and obtained local support for their activities (e.g. youth in Novi Sad registered an organisation called „Sparkles” and will organise several activities to protect the local environment with cooperation with the Novi Sad Scouts Association).

Following are some comments from interviewees:

- „I was an entirely different person before Group 484 started with its programme. Once I started attending workshops being involved in local activities I became a more relaxed person. I had more fun in my life and regained the willpower to attend to my school duties.”
- „I have totally changed, particularly after I realised and saw with my own eyes that it is possible to do something that we planned ourselves, without being told what to do by the elders. Our activities triggered a lot of attention in our town and many people reacted positively to what we have done. I am proud of my role in these activities.”

Donors and Partners

A number of donors and institutions consider the greatest impact of Group 484 to be the fact that they are a key link between institutions such as collective centres and IDPs and that they are often the first step IDPs will make toward independence.

A number of external stakeholders (donors, international organisations) thought that the key impact that Group 484 had achieved was to ensure that the voice of local civil society organisations is heard and respected in developing a poverty reduction strategy programme (PRSP) but also provided an analysis of needs of poor people in Serbia, and communicated it clearly to international donors thus influencing their policies and agendas.

Others were of the view that Group 484 had promoted partnerships on the local level, particularly related to finding solutions for IDPs, which include both NGOs and local authorities. This has set new standards of work for NGOs. As a result of their work, some local authorities now knew much more about the work of NGOs and had enough confidence to use them as partners in solving the problems of people they are working with.

Results (excerpts from the external evaluation of Group 484)

Examples of Best Practice

Policy

„They produced an excellent balanced statement on Kosovo which has provided a very good counter-balance in the usual polarization of opinion on the issue.” (external stakeholder)
„Type and level of involvement in the PRSP.” „Successes in including IDPs and refugees as a target group into PRSP document.” (external stakeholders)

Programme

„Entry into 32 schools in Milosevic times.” (external stakeholder)
„Working with adolescents they made great improvements particularly in times when this was very difficult from 1999 to 2002.” (external stakeholder)
„The initial comprehensive assistance that had been provided to 484 families.” (external stakeholders)
„Empowering IDPs to learn more about their rights was based on the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement that has helped IDPs to structure their knowledge and to be able to refer to a concrete international document.” (external stakeholder)

Beneficiaries

„Their projects with refugees and IDPs. They were one of the first organisations to implement the self-help principle – helping people to have this sort of life.” (external stakeholder)
„The investment they make in their people and the great belief they have in people. For example, they let their part-time associates organise a high-level conference. By doing things this way, they do things in a way that very few people would dare to do.” (external stakeholder)

Transparency

„Group 484 is transparent. They are perhaps the only local NGO that always advertises all their jobs. This is particularly commendable.” (external stakeholder)
„The seriousness that is attached to accountable reporting practices.” (internal stakeholders)

Visibility

„Smart marketing moves that increase the overall visibility of the organisation such as the publication of a diary with UN principles.” (external stakeholder)

Organisational learning

„Readiness to learn new things, the constant appearance of new plans.” (external stakeholder)
„Turning down a contract with a donor. This shows they are an organisation with maturity and integrity.” (external stakeholder)
„The existence of a strategic plan, the fact that Group 484 is trying to make it function, the fact that the group has also tried to create a business plan.” (external stakeholder)
„There is a big potential in training that can be provided by members of the Group to others in Serbia (and perhaps maybe even outside Serbia).” (external and internal stakeholders).

Speed of action

„They are very quick to react to situations of crisis – and not just in the humanitarian field.” (external stakeholder)
„They bring important issues to the attention of other NGOs. They are very alert and a good model for others.” (external stakeholder)

Donors and Partners

Our work would not be possible without the trust and support of our donors and partners.

We are eternally grateful to the following organisations from the OXFAM family:

- OXFAM Great Britain, for being our loyal supporter and mentor from day one. Our first computer and our first training in writing grant proposals came from them.
- OXFAM Solidarity Belgium, who supplied generous quantities of humanitarian aid for our beneficiaries.
- NOVIB (OXFAM Netherlands), whose support over five years helped us build our capacities.
- OXFAM Germany, the sponsor of our youth programmes.

The OXFAM family's values and philosophy have been our permanent source of inspiration and it is thanks to their generous support that our organisation has grown to be what it is today.

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Young people who contributed to the widely popular war games giving way to good old "Don't Get Angry!".

Our partners from organisations with which we share the same mission for realising that working together will make us stronger.

Our donors, for recognising the importance of supporting those who are building places where everyone feels at home.



