



Centar za Izgradnju Mira

Naš put je mir

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Center for Peacebuilding - Oral History Project

Organizational Mission and Background

The Center for Peacebuilding (CIM) has been working for nearly a decade in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) with the motto *naš put je mir* (our way is peace). Our mission is to rebuild trust and foster reconciliation among the people of Bosnia—Croats, Serbs, Bosniaks, and others—as well as support peace processes in other countries that have suffered from violent conflict.

Founded in 2004 by peacebuilders Vahidin Omanovic and Mevludin Rahmanovic, CIM is located in Sanski Most – the former front lines of the conflict in Northwest Bosnia and Herzegovina. CIM plays a critical role in Sanski Most, the surrounding area, and throughout BiH by providing a safe space for constructive interethnic and religious dialogue. Our activities promote human rights and intercultural cooperation. We also train individuals in practical conflict resolution techniques, equipping them with skills to respond to conflict, including potentially violent situations, through creative and nonviolent means.

Project Justification and Summary

The dynamic of neighbor fighting neighbor during the war created deep divisions within and among communities, breeding distrust, hatred, and fear that persist today. According to the Commissioner for Human Rights, "Public manifestations of hate speech and intolerance, especially by politicians, have continued" (Report by Thomas Hammarberg, Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe, Following his visit to Bosnia and Herzegovina on 27-30 November 2010). Political rhetoric has encouraged prejudice, stereotype, and even acts of hatred and violence against the perceived enemy – particularly minorities and returnees.

Bosnia and Herzegovina's generations born during and after the war have only known the current political and social climate of division and conflict. They were never privy to the multiethnic society enjoyed during Yugoslavia, and so have nothing to envision for their future but one in which different ethnicities remain segregated and fearful of one another. What's more, those who did survive the war carry deep scars and heavy narratives rarely confronted or processed since their occurrence two decades ago.

The Center for Peacebuilding's Oral History Project will address Bosnia and Herzegovina's past while, through individual narratives, promoting a peaceful future built on the mutual needs for security and coexistence. In the first stage of this project, CIM will contact participants from previous activities – cranial-sacral therapy sessions, conflict resolution trainings, and dialogues – to recruit individuals ready, willing, and who could benefit from sharing their personal stories. We will then send out journalists

trained by CIM in conflict resolution to gather stories from these willing individuals through interviews and meetings. With the participant's own words, we will transcribe the narratives and edit them as necessary. The book will contain individual stories grouped within four themes/sections:

1. Stories of coexistence and multiethnic relationships before the war
2. Stories of trauma and survival during the war
3. Stories of moral courage, cross-ethnic cooperation and rescuing during the war
4. Stories of reconciliation between individuals after the war

After this first stage of the project, we will publish the book and promote its use as a tool in peace education and dialogue. Through local, entity, and federal-level media, we will discuss the book's themes in presentations, workshops, and other public events. Center for Peacebuilding will hold public and private dialogues, encouraging others to share their own stories and work toward reconciliation.

During this second stage, we also have plans to translate the book into several relevant languages. International dissemination of the book will play two roles: 1. the content will present a more complex and balanced narrative of BiH that dispels the simplified sound bites presented in the global media. 2. The book will provide stories that others in conflict can relate to and draw strength and inspiration from as they work on their own journeys toward reconciliation.

Project Objective, Outcomes, and Impact

Objective: The Center for Peacebuilding's Oral History Project aims to facilitate the post-war healing and reconciliation process for individuals who provide content for the book, as well as those who read it or take part in one of our book-launch events.

Outcomes: Over the course of the project's first phase (gathering content), we will collect between seven and ten stories per section, depending on the length of each story. In total, the book will contain between twenty-eight and forty stories. Initially, we aim to produce two hundred copies of the book and can print more if there is the demand. After publishing the book we will hold book-launch events in five major cities throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina – Sarajevo, Banja Luka, Tuzla, Mostar, and Brcko – in addition to local events held in Sanski Most and neighboring city Prijedor. We will also facilitate separate, multiethnic dialogues on the themes of the book in these same cities with key civil society groups and individuals who are ready to participate in the reconciliation process. Finally, we would like to translate the book into several foreign languages so it can be used in peace education throughout the world. Ideally we would like to have translations available in English, German, French, Russian, Spanish, Arabic, and Hebrew

Impact: On an individual level, our project will be therapeutic for both contributors and readers. In the words of a local peacebuilder, our project is, "not only to tell the truth, but for the story teller to relieve themselves of these stories." Our trained journalists working with storytellers will bear witness to the experiences, helping contributors to process their past in a cathartic and supportive environment.

On a societal level, the book will validate stories from *all* Bosnian and Herzegovinian citizens through their personal, individual truths. This individualism will start a process of deconstructing collective victimization and/or guilt and re-humanizing the “other” into individual citizens. Our content will present diverse and different, even potentially conflicting, narratives in such a way that each individual’s story is valued and respected. During a meeting convened by CIM, this concept was discussed, and it was agreed that individuals’ stories will communicate: “I have a story, and *it is a truth for me.*”

Our third and fourth sections of the text – multiethnic cooperation during the war, and post-war reconciliation – provide positive stories that disprove the myths of ancient ethnic hatreds and debunk stereotypes used so often by manipulative politicians. The book’s content encourages renewed moral courage and bravery within BiH. In acknowledging the good people from all ethnicities who reached across the divide during and after the war, our project also recognizes that this shared society can and should happen again.