



On the Record: Civil Society in Kosovo – Rebuilding After the War

Issue 7: Environment, Women, War Crimes, May 8, 2000

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From the AP Editorial Desk by Iain Guest

This issue On the Record (OTR) follows up on three subjects covered in this series -- the environment, women, and war crimes.

Our readers were recently introduced to Guri Shkodra, the dynamic young co-founder of the Young Ecologists of Kosovo (OTR#6). You were also invited to log on to Andrew Siegel's web site, specially designed for the Young Ecologists on the occasion of Earth Day. (web: www.troop90.net/kye)

Many of you accepted the invitation. Within three days of being posted, Andrew's site had received 1,677 visitors. An analysis shows that 241 were from the World Bank and 80 from the Pentagon. There were 106 visitors from other institutions, 17 from the U.S. Department of the Interior, 15 from Citicorp. The balance, 1,218 visitors, logged on from their home.

OTR#6 also noted that Guri had received a message of support from Joschka Fischer, the German Foreign Minister. The Minister's message is reprinted below.

On the Record will continue to follow Guri's efforts in Kosovo and make sure they are posted on his website.

This issue also returns to the question of how best to assist women's groups in Kosovo (OTR#4). Recent events have underlined just how difficult and important this is.

For the last few weeks, the U.S. Senate has withheld \$20 million of funding from the office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), on the grounds that UNHCR has been

unable to fund two women's groups in Kosovo. One of these, the Center for the Protection of Women and Children, was profiled in OTR#4.

The vehicle by which UNHCR disburses funds to women's groups is the Kosovo Women's Initiative (KWI), a \$10 million fund of U.S. money administered by UNHCR.

Readers will recall that On the Record was critical of the KWI in OTR#4 on the grounds that it was throwing money at Kosovar civic groups instead of slowly and carefully nurturing their strengths.

Our analysis produced an angry response from the UNHCR, but it appears to have been borne out by UNHCR's current problems with the U.S. Senate, which are analyzed in this issue. The KWI has been far more difficult and complex than anyone ever imagined -- for its donors and grantees alike.

But UNHCR should not be punished for this -- or because it cannot disburse KWI funds in the manner and quantity demanded by the US Senate. UNHCR is simply doing what any donor does by insisting that money be properly spent. It would be severely reprimanded by its own donors -- starting with the American government -- if it gave out KWI grants casually.

Holding up UNHCR's entire program in the Balkans is certainly not the way to deal with the structural flaws in the KWI, which need to be addressed if this initiative is to serve U.S. interests. Some of the flaws are reviewed below. Moreover, the Senate's action threatens a wide range of U.S.-supported peace initiatives in Bosnia and Croatia. This is an irresponsible use of aid.

The next issue of On the Record will profile an imaginative aid program by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) - the Office of Transitional Initiatives (OTI), which attempts to build village democracy in Kosovo. This issue will appear after a short interval, because the Advocacy Project is currently working in Africa. (Iain Guest)

Also in this issue, we run a letter from Alison Smith, a legal officer with the International Crisis Group (ICG).

Alison takes issue with our coverage in OTR#2 of the Humanitarian Law Documentation Project, which collected testimony of war crimes in Western Kosovo until it closed in December. She particularly objects to the implication that the Project (which employed 25 international lawyers) was only interested in collecting testimony for the International Criminal Tribunal in the Hague and did not care about building local civil society in Kosovo.

Environment: Germany's Foreign Minister Urges Kosovo Young Ecologists to "Carry on the Good Work!"

The first email message sent by the Young Ecologists of Kosovo was to Joschka Fisher, Germany's Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs. Here is his reply:

Dear Guri,

From the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (German Agency for Technical Cooperation) I heard in March about your Young Ecologists initiative. Unfortunately the email you sent me last year did not reach me.

I find it most impressive and encouraging to see how you and your friends, under the current difficult conditions in Kosovo, are working to protect the environment and bring people together in ways that are peaceful and constructive. The activities you have organized are highly original.

Raising people's awareness of environmental issues is very important and I am sure you are making a valuable contribution here, especially with regard to young people. Carry on the good work with the same creative zest and spirit of can-do! I wish you and all members of the Young Ecologists of Kosovo good luck and every success!

Yours sincerely, Joschka Fischer

Women: US Senate Blocks \$20 Million to UN Refugee Agency in Dispute Over Kosovo Women's Initiative

In a dispute that threatens to disrupt humanitarian aid throughout the Balkans, the U.S. Senate is blocking the disbursement of \$20 million to the UNHCR, in part because UNHCR has failed to fund two prominent Kosovar civil society initiatives -- Radio 21 and the Center for the Protection of Women and Children.

The \$20 million is part of a two-year, \$266-million outlay by the U.S. government for the Balkans. It has been held up by the Senate Foreign Operations Subcommittee of the Foreign Appropriations Committee, which has oversight over large portions of U.S. foreign aid.

The money has been blocked at a critically important time. UNHCR has appealed for \$213 million this year for its work in the Balkans. This will cover, among other things, UNHCR's assistance for refugees returning home in Bosnia and Croatia, the emergency needs of refugees in Serbia, and UNHCR's entire program in Kosovo (budgeted at \$108 million this year). The next few weeks could see movement on several of these fronts. At considerable risk to themselves, Muslim and Croat refugees have started to return to the Serb Republic in Bosnia. (This will be the subject of a forthcoming series of On the Record). Serb refugees are also expected to start returning home in Eastern Croatia following the defeat of nationalists in the recent elections in Croatia. UNHCR's aid could prove critical in helping the refugees to reintegrate.

On the Record has been told that the decision to block the \$20 million comes from the Chairman of the Subcommittee, Senator Mitch McConnell, and his staff, in response to complaints from the Center and Radio 21 that they had not received money from the \$10 million Kosovo Women's Initiative (KWI), which is funded by the United States and administered by UNHCR.

Both the Center and Radio 21 are well known to the U.S. Congress. Both are run by strong,

articulate women -- Sevdie Ahmeti and Aferdita Kelmendi, respectively -- who came to personify the courage of Kosovo's Albanian women during the dark days of Serbian repression. The two women appeared before Congressional hearings and met with Hillary Clinton during visits to the United States.

Senator McConnell and his staff apparently assumed that the two organizations would benefit from the U.S.-backed KWI. But this should never have been taken for granted. As we reported in OTR#4, the KWI makes heavy demands on its donors and recipients and is a less than ideal vehicle for supporting civil society. The U.S. Senate, U.S. State Department, and UNHCR are now finding this out, to their cost.

Search for Quick Results

The KWI was modeled on the Bosnian Women's Initiative (BWI), which the U.S. State Department used to channel \$5 million to women in Bosnia after the war. American opinion was shocked at the use of rape and sexual torture by Bosnian Serb nationalists, and many early BWI projects took the form of trauma counseling and psychosocial support.

When similar reports of rape and sexual violence began to emerge from Kosovo, the U.S. Congress pressed the U.S. State Department to earmark large sums for rape counseling. The State Department was persuaded by UNHCR that this would be inappropriate and that given the stigma attached to rape, any counseling would have to be done with great discretion. Besides which, the extent to which rape had been used was still unclear.

Congress reluctantly agreed. But at the same time there was also considerable pressure -- from the White House downward -- to be seen to act on behalf of Kosovo's embattled women. Congress released \$10 million for the KWI.

Under the KWI formula, UNHCR selected three international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) -- Oxfam, the Danish Refugee Council (DRC), and the German NGO Malteser Hilfsdienst -- to serve as "umbrella organizations." These agencies received immediate funding under KWI. In return, they were asked to serve as intermediaries between UNHCR and Kosovar women's groups, by vetting proposals and generally helping to "build capacity."

Five other NGOs were also contracted to provide specific expertise on reproductive health, microcredit, and psychosocial support.

UNHCR statistics show that as of January 31, \$2,978,000 had been obligated from the KWI, but that only \$530,000 of this had reached local organizations. This figure rose to \$860,100 by the end of February. A total of 78 projects have received funding.

In response to the pressure from the Senate Subcommittee, UNHCR has reportedly agreed to deal directly with four Kosovar organizations, including Radio 21 and the Center, instead of forcing them to go through umbrella NGOs.

This may satisfy Senator McConnell and release UNHCR's \$20 million, but it could also paper

over the deeper flaws of the KWI formula. These flaws need fixing if the KWI is to do what it was intended to do -- support and strengthen the role of women in post-war Kosovo.

A Question of Capacity

The first question concerns the capacity of those women's groups that will receive funding under the KWI.

The Senate Subcommittee should be reassured that a very considerable sum of KWI money (\$860,100) has been dispensed to Kosovar civic groups by the end of February. The fact that the recipients included 53 women's initiatives also showed that KWI funds have been spread around and not concentrated on a select few.

But the statistics also show that only 5 percent of the KWI funding had been disbursed after six months. This should come as no surprise, because after living off their wits and anger for several years, even the best-organized groups were going to find it hard to spend large sums of money.

The Center for the Protection of Women and Children is a case in point. After the war, it decided to set up a network of women's houses throughout Kosovo in an effort to decentralize out of Prishtina. Administratively, however, this was a huge undertaking for Sevdie Ahmeti and her colleagues.

The Center was not always helped by its international "friends." In one example, it agreed to take over the running of several women's houses from the Italian aid agency, ADAB (Associazione Per le Donne Dell'area Dei Balkani). But even this came at a cost. As OTR#4 reported, one house was provocatively opened by ADAB next to an existing women's center in Mitrovica, bequeathing a legacy of confusion and anger in the neighborhood.

Sevdie Ahmeti apparently sought KWI funding for part of its network of women's houses at the end of last year. But UNHCR considered the request too ambitious. Discussions then took place during December and January. UNHCR says that it received no response from the Center during the next two months, but that the request was definitely not turned down. From UNHCR's perspective, this is precisely the kind of prudence that would be expected from a beneficiary of U.S. funds. The U.S. State Department has imposed such strict guidelines on the use of KWI funds that one UNHCR official in Kosovo even complained of being "micromanaged."

U.S. State Department officials certainly sympathize with UNHCR on this. One said that Sevdie Ahmeti has let it be known that the Center does not need KWI funding and has money from other sources.

The other Kosovar organization that has complained, Radio 21, began life as an imaginative media project for young women that was created in 1995 by Aferdita Kelmendi, one of Kosovo's foremost women radio journalists. This evolved into Radio 21, which began broadcasting on May 11, 1998, over the Internet (see OTR Volume 9, #9). Its website attracted an astounding 2.3 million visitors in 1999.

Radio 21 continues to comprise these two very different components. The radio station is one of the most professional in Kosovo and its 17 journalists broadcast to a high quality. It is unclear why such a successful radio station would need what amounts to a subsidy under the KWI (not to mention the distorting effect this would have on Kosovo's highly competitive media).

The Radio 21 media project, on the other hand, had trained 88 young women in communications skills by the end of last year and would fit into the KWI criteria. But once again, U.S. officials -- and even some UNHCR staff -- are not even sure if a formal request has been made. Like Sevdie Ahmeti's organization, Radio 21 is known internationally and has attracted considerable support from other sources.

So why have these two successful organizations pushed so hard and complained so loudly -- putting UNHCR's entire Balkans funding at risk? The most likely explanation is that both Sevdie Ahmeti and Aferdita Kelmendi have taken umbrage at the KWI formula, which requires them to deal with the international NGO umbrella agencies.

Umbrella Organizations and Other KWI Flaws

From UNHCR's perspective, the argument for managing the KWI through international umbrella NGOs is simple. UNHCR does not implement programs. Instead, the agency relies on implementing partners in the field, and very often, these are NGOs.

Initially, several long-established Kosovar women's groups resented having to deal with international NGOs (as was reported in OTR#4). After years of standing alone against the Serbian authorities, they suddenly found themselves answerable to foreigners who had been in Kosovo for less than a year and who saw the development of Kosovar civil society through the short-term prism of humanitarian aid.

These Kosovar groups also questioned the automatic assumption that international NGOs were more efficient than Kosovar groups. Nor could they understand why these umbrella groups received funds at the outset while they themselves had to justify every penny.

As if to confirm their suspicions, one of the three umbrella groups that was initially selected by UNHCR, the DRC, performed so poorly in Mitrovica that it was asked to step down by UNHCR.

In place of the DRC, UNHCR has designated two of the largest and most experienced NGOs in Kosovo, Mercy Corps International (MCI) and the International Rescue Committee (IRC). MCI has a long history of working with civil society in Kosovo, while the IRC has long experience with psychosocial assistance. In addition, UNHCR plans to deal directly with the Center for the Protection of Women and Children and Radio 21, which have complained to the U.S. Senate. But these measures will not necessarily resolve the underlying problems. UNHCR will still need to be reassured that the Center's plans are realistic, while all other KWI applicants will still have to work through umbrella agencies. Many may feel the same resentment but lack the means to do anything about it.

Furthermore, dealing directly with Kosovar NGOs will demand more from UNHCR staff, at a

time when the agency is scaling down its involvement in Kosovo.

A second concern about the KWI is coordination. On paper, KWI offers an opportunity to impose some discipline among the many women's initiatives that have sprung up in Kosovo, and as late as January meetings were held twice a week at UNHCR for KWI beneficiaries.

The problem is that the very existence of so much KWI money has encouraged a proliferation of women's groups and a competitive scramble for money. This greatly magnifies the challenge of coordination. It also underscores the critical importance of UNHCR being able to say no to a proposal without a gun being held to its head by the U.S. Senate.

One recent visitor to Kosovo suggested that KWI was at its best when it comes in to support small rural coalitions that emerge naturally under larger women's groups, like Aureola or Motrat Qiriazhi (see OTR#4). Regular KWI coordination meetings are now trying to figure out what women and communities really want -- something that should have been done months ago.

A third concern about KWI is information. UNHCR and the U.S. State Department have received a nasty shock from the Senate Appropriations Committee, but there is still much confusion about the KWI in Washington. As of the end of April 2000, the latest available statistics dated from the end of January. UNHCR has done a poor job of making its case to the U.S. government.

KWI as a Catalyst for Development

The KWI is intended to bridge the gap between emergency relief and long-term development and to empower the women of Kosovo for years to come. This is made easier by the fact that there is no time-limit on spending the money (as was mistakenly implied in OTR#4). At the same time, KWI is still widely viewed as a humanitarian initiative. Will it be able to make the transition?

One tool that could help is microcredit. By the end of February 2000, \$61,600 of KWI funding had gone into microloans. The International Catholic Migration Commission is the umbrella NGO administering the loans.

Microcredit, and small to medium loans, offer a tried and tested way of triggering an economic revival at the level of communities. But the lesson from Bosnia is that for this to happen, any lending program has to be delinked from humanitarian aid -- and from UNHCR -- as soon as possible.

UNHCR introduced microcredit to Bosnia in 1996 as a form of psychosocial assistance to refugee and displaced women. The rationale was that women who had suffered trauma in war would derive a therapeutic value from earning money and paying back loans.

The problem was that their needs as refugees did not make them good businesswomen. The first Bosnian NGO to administer microloans for UNHCR -- the Tuzla-based Bosnian Committee of Support (BOSPO) -- was shocked when one-third of its initial borrowers defaulted. The reason was that many of the loans had gone to displaced women who lacked business skills and

economic motivation. In addition, there were no markets for the handicrafts that they typically produced.

This underscores the importance of treating microcredit as a tool of economic recovery that has to justify itself on strict economic terms -- and for delinking it from refugee assistance as soon as possible

In practice this may prove more difficult in Kosovo than it was in Bosnia because microcredit requires technical assistance, follow-up, banks, and markets -- none of which is really available in Kosovo. UNHCR is clearly not the agency to provide this sort of back-up.

But in practice, UNHCR may have little choice. As yet, there seems to be little interest among UNHCR's international partners in developing a national program of microcredit in Kosovo. The World Bank (which eventually picked up UNHCR's microcredit program in Bosnia and turned it into a strong local program) cannot make the same commitment in Kosovo because there is no government with which it can deal.

As a result, the KWI may continue to serve as the main conduit for disbursing microcredit to Kosovo's women for the foreseeable future. This would leave UNHCR no alternative but to beef up its banking expertise in order to exercise the kind of oversight expected by its U.S. donors.

This will increase the cost of administering the KWI -- which from UNHCR's perspective is one of its biggest drawbacks.

No provision is made in the KWI to cover UNHCR's administrative costs. This has made it hard for UNHCR to find staff. In addition, as in any post-war emergency, there has been a high turnover of UNHCR staff in Kosovo. At least three UNHCR officials have managed the KWI in the last eight months. The current director has responsibility for all UNHCR's community development programs.

More flexibility for UNHCR should have been built in to the KWI at the start, and with the wisdom of hindsight this is one of many improvements that the KWI's original American sponsors would make were the experiment to be repeated. But this will be little consolation to UNHCR, as it struggles to get its \$20 million released.

UNHCR finds itself caught in the worst of all worlds. It is being forced by the U.S. Senate to intensify its involvement in the large and demanding KWI, at a time when the Kosovo emergency is receding and UNHCR is under pressure to scale down and leave. Many of UNHCR's donors would like the agency to concentrate more on refugee emergencies and less on post-war reconstruction. Needless to say, they are led by the United States.

A Message from the International Crisis Group

"It is misleading to suggest that we did not care about doing whatever we could to help our local partners and staff prepare for the future."

(From the editors: Issue #2 of this series -- Criminal Pursuit -- looked at the efforts of international agencies and NGOs to monitor war crimes committed by Serbia forces during the war. Among those reviewed was the Humanitarian Law Documentation Project, which collected testimony of war crimes in Western Kosovo until it closed in December 1999. The following letter is from Alison Smith, a legal officer with the International Crisis Group (ICG) -- one of the NGO sponsors of the project.)

The recent piece in *On The Record* concerning the collection of evidence on war crimes to assist the Hague Tribunal contains some factual inaccuracies, which have the effect of mischaracterizing the International Crisis Group's Humanitarian Law Documentation Project (the Project) in many important respects. It is unclear why seemingly no attempt was made to contact the Project Director or any of the other staff, who have continued to follow up with our local partners and local staff following the official end of the Project in December. If this had been done, perhaps many of the mistakes contained in the article could have been avoided.

On behalf of all staff of the ICG Humanitarian Law Documentation Project, I would therefore like to address some of the issues as they arise in the article.

From its inception in May 1999 in Tirana, Albania, the Project worked under the auspices of the International Crisis Group (ICG), an international NGO based in Brussels, under an agreement with the International Criminal Tribunal (ICTY) for the former Yugoslavia with funding secured from the European Community Humanitarian Office (ECHO).

The Project was the brainchild of members of a team, which had investigated war crimes in Kosovo in late 1998, a project conducted by No Peace Without Justice (NPWJ), an NGO with headquartered in Rome. The Project worked closely with local NGOs both in Albania (including the Center for Peace Through Justice) and in Kosovo, and it was primarily those organizations, rather than international Project staff, who carried out interviews in the field. This was done in order to ensure the integrity of information collecting, as local interviewers can more easily break through culture and language barriers than international interviewers, and to ensure that the process itself benefited local human rights groups with assistance and training.

From the beginning, the Project provided capacity building of local NGOs, not only through logistical assistance (such as transport and communications), but also through advice on interviewing techniques, the basics of international humanitarian law, fundraising seminars, etc. It is therefore simply incorrect to say that "NPWJ started to interview Kosovar refugees in the Albanian camps": although the Project Director was on leave from NPWJ and many of the Project key staff were previously involved in other NPWJ activities, the Project started out in Albania as an ICG Project and in any event, the persons carrying out interviews in Albania were activists of Albanian human rights organizations. Further, it was Project staff that opened the Kosovo field office in the Ethnological Museum in Gjakova on 16 July 1999, rather than initiate a partnership with ICG at that moment as is suggested in the article.

The processes in Kosovo followed the same principles as those in Albania, with the Project concluding agreements with local NGOs who then carried out the interviews in the field with logistical and substantive assistance from international Project staff. One addition to the work in

Kosovo was the agreement entered into with Medecins du Monde Sweden (MDM), under which Project staff and local partners received training in recognizing symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) to enable them to refer witnesses suffering from PTSD to MDM counselors and social workers. The process was also intended to benefit Project staff and local partners, both in dealing with the type of information they were gathering and because most were victims of war crimes themselves. Many of our local staff have said they found the process beneficial on a personal and professional level.

In Kosovo, the Project had -- at any one time -- approximately 25 international staff, composed of international legal experts, logistics and other staff, most of whom had already worked with the Project in Albania. Of the 75 local staff employed by the Project in Kosovo, approximately half were interviewers, with the rest being data entry operators, administration, logistics, drivers, and guards.

Interviewers were encouraged whenever possible to enter the information in the database themselves, to familiarize themselves with the type of information required by the ICTY, and to avoid any misunderstandings about information written on the interview form. This also had the benefit of clarifying what type of conduct amounted to a violation of international humanitarian law -- for example, that it was not just mass executions but also conduct like stealing or destruction of personal property -- as well as assisting them in improving and, in some cases, learning computer skills. This was also done with one eye to the future, namely the donation of computer equipment to organizations upon the conclusion of the Project. As always, the concern of the Project rested with the integrity of the information provided to the ICTY as well as capacity building of local organizations.

As the Project reached its end, all staff worked together to try to find employment for the staff remaining in Kosovo, and the Project was approached by many organizations seeking to hire Project staff, whose professionalism and dedication were well known in Gjakova and elsewhere. The majority of our local staff has in fact found employment, many with the ICTY itself, others with other organizations, both international and local.

It should be remembered that the Project itself was still operating in early December 1999 and therefore staff would not have needed to find employment elsewhere, and that many staff, particularly administration, logistics, interpreters, and data entry operators, are of school and university age and, following the closure of the Project, have returned to their studies. Many local staff have found that the computer training and increased exposure to English they received working with the Project has helped with finding employment elsewhere and with their studies.

It is simply wrong to suggest, as the article does, that the Project did not care enough to try to help Project staff find employment once we were gone. In fact, already in late November, a month before the scheduled end of the operation, the Project organized a meeting of international organizations in Gjakova to alert them that our local staff would become available, and our Personnel Coordinator operated essentially as a placement center for all our staff. If the author had asked any of our local staff about this, this misconception would not have arisen.

The Project's primary mandate was to assist the ICTY by gathering information on serious

violations of international humanitarian law and providing that information to the ICTY in a format that was easily accessible and searchable (the uniform database). To this end, Western Kosovo, the region within which the Project worked, was divided into areas of responsibility (AORs) with mobile teams operating in each AOR. Each team consisted of one or two international staff and members of the local NGO, typically the Council for the Defense of Human Rights and Freedoms (CDHRF), within that municipality.

This was done because local members from the municipality both knew the municipality as well as had the trust and respect of the community, thereby making the interview process more efficient and less traumatic for the persons being interviewed. It should be noted that every attempt was made to ensure that re-interviewing witnesses did not occur. Before any interview was taken, the witness was always asked if they had been interviewed before by any organization. If the answer was yes, then the interview was stopped before it started. The area of expertise of the Project was international humanitarian law, with many staff members having worked at the ICTY, and it was in this area that the Project was best qualified to offer assistance.

Nonetheless, despite information gathering being the primary mandate, the Project provided whatever assistance was possible to the local community, through a system of referrals to organizations with expertise in humanitarian assistance (such as health and shelter). The Project also took capacity-building of local NGOs very seriously, to the extent that one international staff member's duties were concerned solely with this function. The Project organized training for local NGOs in matters such as use of technology, fund raising, and human rights education and donated the equipment used in Albania and Kosovo to local organizations in order to help them continue their work and expand their organizations.

While the Project itself ended on 19 December 1999, Project staff remained in the region until 29 December, traveling through Albania and Kosovo, to distribute the remaining equipment. To maximize the usefulness of the equipment donated, the Project also entered an agreement with the Kosovo Foundation for an Open Society (KFOS) to ensure ongoing technical support and training in the use of the equipment, which included computers, printers, digital cameras, and Global Positioning Systems. The Project staff member concerned with capacity-building is still in Kosovo, under an agreement with KFOS, to provide ongoing support, training in fund raising, and advocacy that had commenced before the Project ended. As all local organizations will gladly testify, they have found the training and equipment provided very useful in carrying out their activities, a fact not mentioned in the On The Record piece. It is surprising that the author has neglected to contact any of these local organizations to inquire how they have put the equipment "to good use," given that at least one of the recipients -- the Human Rights Center at the Law Faculty of the University of Prishtina -- is easily contactable even from outside Kosovo.

The article suggests that the Project's work "might well benefit the Hague tribunal, but will probably do little for Kosovar civil society." The Project always operated according to two basic principles. First that the work, namely the collection of interviews, had to be undertaken in such a way that the process itself benefited Kosovars. While Project staff believe that justice is an important component in rebuilding civil society, we have always recognized that this would be a long process, a fact Project staff took pains to point out to witnesses so as not to raise false hopes. Because of this, it was important that the process itself gave something to the community,

for example, by skills-training and referring people in remote communities to organizations that could provide direct help.

Second, this in itself was not enough, and we had to leave something behind that would be of lasting benefit to Kosovars beyond the work itself. For this reason, the Project provided computer training for the equipment that was ultimately donated to local organizations, as well as provided ongoing assistance with fund raising, grant proposal writing, advocacy, and management. It is also misleading to suggest that the information will not be useful to ICTY investigators, since it has already proven useful to investigators in the field. The databases provided to the ICTY by various organizations all follow the same basic format -- that developed by the ICTY itself. The process of standardization currently being undertaken in The Hague has more to do with improving the database as ICTY investigators refine their procedures based on experience. Indeed, Project staff are still working with the ICTY investigators to help them develop a search engine that will comply with all their requirements, particularly those that were previously unforeseen.

The author of the piece talks about coordination between the Project and American Bar Association's CEELI project without making any attempt to explain this situation. The ICG Project and ABA-CEELI had different methods of operation and priorities.

The Project's work was centered around the idea that existing local organizations were best placed to establish a relationship and interview witnesses, provided that "foreign" assistance was given in identifying the format and focus of the interviews in order to make them useful for the ICTY. Project international staff traveled together with local NGO partners to refugee camps in Albania and later to towns and villages throughout Western Kosovo. The Project provided transport, advice on interviewing techniques and ensured that the information collected by the local partner was entered in the uniform database provided by the ICTY.

The Centre for Peace Through Justice, established with the assistance of ABA-CEELI, was one of the many local partner NGOs that the Project worked with, particularly in Albania. When Kosovars returned to Kosovo, the Centre for Peace Through Justice continued to operate in Albania and through their offices in Prishtina. The Project itself moved its operations to Kosovo, and the new local partners were primarily the branches of the CDHRF in each of the municipalities where it operated.

Once in Kosovo the method of operation of the two Projects varied considerably, primarily because the ICG Project concluded partnership agreements with pre-existing Kosovar organizations in the region where it operated and took responsibility for their operation and training for the duration of the work.

Also, the data collected were used in different ways. Information collected by the ICG Project was provided exclusively to the ICTY, with the exception of minority interviews that were also provided to UNHCR and Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) for the purpose of their ongoing protection mandate, and not to anybody else. ABA-CEELI, funded by the U.S. Government, has a mandate to provide information also to the U.S. State Department. Further, ICG Project interviewers were primarily lawyers and human rights activists from the

local CDHRF and were employed full time, irrespective of the number of interviews collected, rather than paid by results. This allowed the Kosovar human rights organizations to resume work in Kosovo immediately after the conflict when most of their members, lacking outside support, would have had to abandon their human rights work to concentrate on providing for their families.

It is hoped that this elaboration has clarified the misconceptions that the author was apparently laboring under about the Project's work in Kosovo. The primary concern of all international staff working for the Project was the well being of Kosovars: witnesses, our local staff and partners, and the community at large. On a personal level, we lived in Gjakova and worked in Gjakova and surrounding municipalities for 6 months, and we left many friends behind when the Project concluded its operations in December 1999. Indeed, some of our international staff remained in Kosovo either to follow-up the capacity-building work already undertaken or with other functions and the rest left reluctantly.

It is misleading and would be instantly denied by any and all of our local staff and NGO partners to suggest that we did not care about doing whatever we could to help our local partners and staff prepare for the future.

Alison Smith, International Legal Officer, ICG Humanitarian Law Documentation Project (email: otto_123@hotmail.com). Project Director, Niccolo Figa-Talamanca (email: niccolo@figatalamanca.net).

(From the OTR editors: we appreciate this detailed reply from Alison, and are obviously impressed at the efforts made by the Documentation Project to ensure that its monitoring made a lasting impact in Kosovo. The issue in question portrayed the situation in Kosovo at the end of 1999. Efforts were made to contact international staff from the Project during editing, but without success).