

# Peace and conflict transformation

## forumZFD and the Civil Peace Service

forumZFD



At the celebration of the tenth anniversary of the founding of forumZFD, federal minister Heidemarie Wieczorek-Zeul granted forumZFD recognition as a development service organisation under the Development Workers Act (DWA). She is seen in the picture together with the chair, Dr. Tilman Evers, and Anna Crummenerl, a professional peace worker in Israel/Palestine.

Today, the promotion of peace is not only an important area of work in the BMZ (Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development). It is also established – as a concept and in organisational structures – as a cross-cutting task of the federal government. This can be seen in the guidelines “Preventing Crises, Resolving Conflicts, Building Peace”, for example. The creation of the Civil Peace Service and the current cooperation between the CPS Consortium and the ministry are evidence of the ability of both civil society and the federal government to engage in dialogue. The nexus between development and peace is now internationally beyond dispute: Peace was included as one of the 17 goals of the Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Officially, the “50 Years of the DWA” at forumZFD did not begin until 2 March 2007, when it was awarded recognition as a development service organisation. On that day, the then Federal Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development, Heidemarie Wieczorek-Zeul, wrote to forumZFD “with great satisfaction”:

“This is a vindication of your successful work as an organisation which played a decisive role in the design and implementation of the Civil Peace Service”.

That an organisation which advertised its purpose as the promotion of peace and conflict transformation was recognised under the Development Workers Act was evidence of a changed understanding of the role of peace and conflict transformation in development service and beyond. In the 1990s, after the East-West conflict came to an end, temporarily at least, new wars in former Yugoslavia, Iraq, and Rwanda caused widespread disillusionment. A global debate began about how peace could be maintained and how social conflicts could be transformed nonviolently. In Germany, forumZFD developed the concept of a civil peace service, a civil professional service with government funding and civil society partners around the world which would strengthen the potential for peace in conflict situations and contribute to the transformation of conflict.

### INDIVISIBLE: DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE

The idea of a civil peace service met with a great deal of scepticism initially, but political support for it grew during the second half of the 1990s. In 1998, a new government budget line was created for a Civil Peace Service. Through the joint work of five development service organisations and other agencies, which already had a wealth of experience of working in conflict situations, a separate discipline with new methods of working came into being.

### TRAINING FOR PEACE WORK

forumZFD’s practical experience of civil peace service began long before it was recognised as an independent development service organisation, when the first development workers who worked as trained professional peace workers went out to Kosovo, Croatia, and Israel/Palestine. The organisation currently has a presence in eleven countries. And, drawing on the experience which we have been able to gain abroad thanks to the DWA, a local conflict counselling programme has been created in Germany in order to bring about change in our own country, which is very much in the spirit of the founding fathers and mothers of the DWA.

One of the preconditions for effective peace work anywhere is rigorous training. For this reason, many development workers, mostly from the Civil Peace Service, undergo training as peace and conflict consultants at our Academy for Conflict Transformation before they leave. We are especially pleased that more and more partner organisations from the Global South are sending their staff to train with us.

We see our work in development service “as part of a world-wide effort to minimise the use of weapons and other forms of collective violence and substitute them (with) non-violent action – between individuals, between groups and between nations”, as stated in forumZFD’s mission statement. We remain committed to peace. This commitment will continue to underpin our work and that of our partners in the future.

# From soldier to peace campaigner

## Speaking out against war

The debate about a civil peace service at the beginning of the 1990s was prompted largely by the wars in the Balkans. As a consequence, this is where forumZFD's first professional peace workers were sent. forumZFD focuses its work in the region on historical and educational work with the aim of overcoming enmity and promoting a culture of nonviolence.

Ursula Renner worked from 2001 to 2009 as a Civil Peace Service professional first in Serbia and later in Croatia. She supported the establishment of a trauma centre for war veterans in Serbia and prepared the ground for reconciliation work with veterans and their associations in Serbia and Croatia.

### ONE IN FOUR PERSONS IS TRAUMATISED

Miodrag Tasic is a war veteran. He lives in a village near the city of Vranje in southern Serbia. Beyond the range of hills alongside the city lies Kosovo. Tasic fought in Croatia on the side of the Yugoslav army and lost his right forearm in 1994, when he was hit by a Panzerfaust. He was only 28 years old, married and the father of a four-year-old daughter and a three-year-old son.

He was unable to cope with life any more after the war. His marriage ended through divorce soon after his return and his children grew up without him. Tasic is one of probably several thousand traumatised veterans in Serbia.

Vladan Beara, a counsellor from the Novi Sad Trauma Centre, which was built up with the support of Ursula Renner of forumZFD, estimates that 20 to 25 percent of those who participated in the war are traumatised to varying degrees. That means that there are more than 200,000 such people in Serbia alone. The psychologist explains: "War is chaos. Soldiers experience existential fear of death. Many of them are unable to find their way back into civilian life properly afterwards." They suffer from sleep disorders and are afraid of the dark or frightened when someone sits behind them on the bus. They experience flashbacks and tend to go into a rage or turn violent without warning. More than a few of these veterans see suicide as the only way out.

### DIFFICULT TRAUMA WORK

For a long time, Miodrag Tasic did not know how to cope with his problems, but Dr Boban Stamenkovic, then head of psychiatry at a local hospital, persuaded him to participate in a seminar for traumatised veterans organised by the Novi Sad Trauma Centre. The renewed confrontation with a repressed trauma is very difficult for many veterans. Many of them cling on to old enemy images. They cannot bear the thought that the war – and

therefore their own suffering – may have been pointless. This means that veterans in the post-war societies of the Balkans are more likely to belong to the radical nationalist section of society, and they do not all have the psychological strength to face up to their memories during therapy. A lot of Miodrag Tasic's friends envy him for having dared to take that step. Today he is a different person. The therapy awakened in Tasic the need to oppose war and help other veterans.

In February 2008, he travelled back to Croatia for the first time in 15 years, together with professional peace worker Ursula Renner. He faced his own trauma and met with several Croatian veterans to discuss joint meetings of Serbian and Croatian veterans. He found veterans on the other side like himself, who, because of their own personal experiences, wanted to start a genuine dialogue between the former warring parties in the Balkans. And who could be more credible as proponents of reconciliation than those who previously faced each other with weapons in their hands?

"Nobody knows better than we do as veterans, how horrific war really is. Who else is going to speak out against it, if we don't?" he says, explaining his commitment to reconciliation today.

Miodrag Tasic has made a decision. He wants to speak as a veteran about his wartime experiences. He wants politicians, and young people especially, to understand what war is really like. His own story should not be repeated.

