

christian peacemaker teams

# **Lesbos 2016**

## **CPT Mediterranean Project**

### **Annual Report**



## **Christian Peacemaker Teams**

Over its thirty-year history, Christian Peacemaker Teams has operated in close partnership with nonviolent movements around the world. CPT work involves extensive training in nonviolence and sustained and robust work in conflict zones. CPT is a peacemaking organization that partners with local communities to strengthen human rights and work nonviolently against oppression, violence and war.

Christian Peacemaker Teams establishes long-term relationships with local peacemaking communities that are confronting situations of potential lethal conflict. Our teams of trained peace workers seek to work through local peacemakers to confront systems of violence and oppression. Our goal is to build deep and long-lasting partnerships, support our partners in their work and to amplify their voices and spread their stories to our home communities and the world. By being present with an international team, we also aim to show solidarity to local peace-building communities and activists and to use our privilege as a protection from aggressions against our partners.

Christian Peacemaker Teams is inspired by the witness of Jesus and of many individuals and groups who are working nonviolently to reclaim their dignity and human rights. CPT does not engage in proselytization and works gladly together with persons and organisations from other faith backgrounds that share its fundamental values.

This report on CPT's work on the Greek island of Lesbos was written by the coordinators, who led an international group of volunteers from May 2016 to January 2017.

*Juliane Assmann, Jakob Fehr, Ramyar Hassani und Hannah Rosenfeld - Feb. 2017*

## **CPT Mediterranean**

In the spring of 2014 CPT was invited to assist local partners on Lesbos who accompany and protect refugees. We believe in the freedom of movement and in a world without borders. Migration is a normal human experience and should not be criminalized, especially in cases of

flight from war and persecution. Within the last few years and especially during the enormous crisis in 2015, we have been proud to have established a lasting partnership with the Greek network „Lesbos Solidarity“.

Why are we on Lesbos? The present-day wealth of the global North is built upon a history of colonialism and exploitation which have caused and continue to cause poverty, wars, unemployment and lack of prospects for the majority of the world population. Our conviction is that everyone should have the right to the same chances for a fulfilled life, and this is particularly true for refugees who escape war, torture and persecution. In a political climate that relies on bureaucratic and physical walls, this is not possible. We do not want to live in a "Fortress Europe" which is shutting out the people of those same countries we invaded one or two centuries ago. If we are serious in pursuing the agenda of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, we cannot ignore those that ask us for help to gain these rights, especially when in form of that special and important human right: seeking asylum.

Our observations on Lesbos lead us to the judgment that EU policies have not improved the status or living conditions of refugees, but indeed have made them worse. Thousands are stranded in Turkey, Greece, the Baltic countries and North African countries. Many thousands of people do not know what will happen to them or when their status or refugee claims will be resolved – their lives are stuck in limbo. Connected to this is the fact that EU and Greek policies encourage isolating



these people from other inhabitants. This is why we have maintained our presence on Lesbos even though the media had mostly left again.

## The Bigger Picture

What does our work achieve? Along with many other groups currently providing refugees a friendly welcome in Europe, we are taking small, concrete steps with a larger goal in mind: transforming oppressive structures into more just and caring communities.

The local CPT team, our European and worldwide networks

Public outreach through blogs, social media and in-depth reports

cooperation with partners' projects (Pikpa, Mosaik, Café Nan, etc.)

personal encounters and dialogue with refugees

raising public pressure to act; showing Europe that it fails to meet its own moral standards, unmasking its double standards

support for and solidarity with Greek partners, expanding local partnerships, humanitarian aid for refugees

providing a human face to persons entering Europe, helping them to integrate into social groups

undoing "Fortress Europe" through transforming our thinking and actions, with the goal of effecting policy changes

## Developments on Lesbos since 2015

There are three centres for refugees on Lesbos. The official reception center on Lesbos, Moria, was designated a so-called „hotspot“ in March 2016. The political authorities provide only the most basic human needs, but only because of the assistance of NGOs and international relief organisations. An additional official centre for refugees, Kara Tepe, was established 2015 just north of Mytilene.

The third centre is a small, alternative, welcoming camp called „Pikpa“, established and run by our local partner Lesbos Solidarity. It has remained a protective temporary home for special and vulnerable cases since 2012.

In 2016 the Greek courts intensified its use of court cases against alleged human smugglers. Most of the accused persons are very clearly not smugglers, but simply refugees. We condemn the criminalization of migration and will keep pushing for a change in EU policies. (See 'Legal Monitoring' below.)

2016 was supposed to be the year in which the EU could recover from the influx of refugees that arrived in 2015. This is why on March 18, 2016, the EU-Turkey agreement was implemented. Greece now had the right to deport one refugee back to Turkey — without any asylum process — for every refugee that is resettled to the EU. This helped to reduce the migrant flow significantly — but by December of 2016, the EU had still taken in only 2761 Syrians from Turkey, while millions of migrants live in harsh conditions in Turkey and thousands of migrants still await the processing of their applications in the hotspots in Greece.

The situation at the hotspot Moria in



Sport in Pikpa

2016 deserves further elaboration. With a capacity for 3,000 persons but at most times harbouring more than 5,000, the camp was constantly overcrowded. Unlike in 2015, the refugees are not allowed to travel to the mainland, but must remain on the island during the entire asylum procedure. This means they have to wait for an undetermined length of time, many of them for more than a year, during which time they are not informed about the status of their application.

Many have to live in tents even in the cold, wet and occasionally snowy winter, there is very limited access to running water and electricity, and even doctors and lawyers have only restricted access into the camp. In some tents, 30 people of different families and even different nationalities have to share a common space. This makes communication difficult and privacy an impossible luxury. In the heat of summer 2016, only 2 liters of water were provided per person for drinking, cooking and washing. Furthermore, throughout the year, there have been repeated reports of expired food, maggots and insects found in the food. Considering all these factors, it is no surprise that many inmates are in unstable mental conditions. Some show self-harming behaviour, some are suicidal and even attempted suicide. In September 2016, there was turmoil that led to a fire that destroyed parts of the camp. As a



**Ronbir, CPT worker, listening to a man in the Moria camp**

consequence, more makeshift tents were set up which now have to serve as winter housing.

After the coup attempt in Turkey Lesbos saw a renewed influx of arrivals. It is clear that the situation is not going to improve soon, even now in 2017. However, it must be emphatically stated that the Moria camp cannot provide appropriate living conditions for these people.

## Our Team's Activities

In 2016 our team re-established its presence in May and maintained a constant team on Lesbos until February 2017, with only a 2-week interruption over Christmas. Team strength varied between two and six volunteers, who came from 12 different countries and 4 continents.

### Lesbos Solidarity

In October, Efi Latsoudi, representing Lesbos Solidarity, was awarded the international UNHCR Nansen Refugee Award, in recognition of the immense efforts that she and her organisation have made to provide dignity and protection to the stranded people on Lesbos.

We are very proud and thankful to be a partner of such a great initiative which has worked tirelessly for refugee rights over the years.

One of the most significant achievements of Lesbos Solidarity is the alternative and open welcome center Pikpa which houses around 100 vulnerable migrants, including families, unaccompanied minors and individuals in need of medical care. In contrast to the government-run camps, Pikpa is infused with an atmosphere of respect and dignity, where refugees participate in decision-making for the community. It



provides access to medical care, legal assistance, education, proper food and shelter.

Our team helped with many activities like food distribution, sorting clothes, site maintenance, kindergarten, language classes and gardening. We also supported Pikpa by accompanying refugees to hospitals or public offices and serving as translators, as well as providing transport when needed. Especially in the wintertime, when most volunteers and “voluntourists” had left the island, CPT was an important part of the core team keeping everyday life running.

## Reconciliation with the Sea

As many of those crossing the Mediterranean to get to Europe had never seen the sea before nor enjoyed recreation at the beach, open water became an image of fear for some adults and children. Part of the task of overcoming trauma is to regain one’s autonomy and confidence in oneself, which is why the organisation ProemAid decided to offer swimming lessons. When the refugees made contact with the seawater they were also getting in touch with their own experiences. The programme taught children,



women and men a skill that is useful in Europe. The swimming lessons were part of the program offered at Pikpa and our team assisted regularly with the lessons. Four life-guards were insufficient to watch over a group of 15 to 20 non-swimmers. This activity was as much fun for the „swimming students“ as for our team.

## Night Watch

One of our more sleep-depriving tasks was the night shift with the life-guards from ProemAid and helpers from ERCI. Several nights a week, a team of 5 to 10 people held watch overnight at the coast, looking for

new boat arrivals, standing ready to distribute aid and/or contact the responsible institutions to transport the migrants to the hotspot in Moria for registration. In order to welcome everybody properly in Europe, there always were blankets, dry clothes and snacks at the ready, as well as at least one person capable of speaking Arabic or Farsi to communicate with new arrivals.



## Media and Political Work

A significant aspect of our work consists in sharing the stories we experience, putting a human face on the major news headlines. It is important to close the gap between „them“ and „us“, especially in this refugee crisis where many see migrants as a threat to Europe. With our blog „Human rights on the edge“ ([cptmediterranean.wordpress.com](http://cptmediterranean.wordpress.com)), we bring Lesbos closer to people around the world and work towards understanding and solidarity. Sharing our experiences also increases the public pressure on decision-makers in the EU. Politicians and bureaucrats can ignore the suffering of migrants when their inaction remains unobserved. But when public attention is brought to bear on a crisis, they have difficulty explaining their failure to act and are often spurred to improve their policies.

On **World Refugee Day** (June 20) we organised a public action demanding safe passage for asylum seekers. Forbidding refugees from traveling by plane or ferry only endangers human lives. The Greek authorities are part of the system that is criminalizing migration just as much as the EU government and the countries building fences and walls. To remind the public of the possibility of change, we went to Sappho Square in the center of Mytilene. We walked through the streets of the city, thanking the local Greeks for their support during these last years.

Many of the shopkeepers depend on tourism and although their businesses have seen a decrease in income due to the refugee crisis, many have donated during the hardest times and many of them continue to show hospitality.

To explain our work in a short time to new people, we also produced an introduction video to our project last year. You can find it on Youtube under the title „CPT Lesbos“:

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=3uIJZN9UtOU](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3uIJZN9UtOU)

We use it for fundraising as well as for CPT presentations.



## Legal Monitoring

Since our first year on Lesbos in 2014 we have seen individual refugees being convicted of human smuggling, even though they were only steering the refugee boat; in some cases they were forced at gunpoint on the Turkish shore to take the helm. There are several reasons for this. EU policies aim at combatting smugglers instead of providing safe passage. And the authorities believe that this practice will (somehow) dissuade people from taking the short boat ride across the sea. Consequently, the Greek coast guard has regularly arrested those found to be steering the boat and indicted them for human smuggling. Of course,

the real smugglers are rarely caught by this method, but this procedure holds up the appearance of acting against the crime of human smuggling.

In the autumn of 2016 we started to monitor court cases more systematically. We worked with a Greek lawyer who gave us case lists, organised prison visits for us and helped us with translation during and after trial. We have visited detainees in prisons on the islands of Lesbos and Chios and interviewed them about their cases, their situation and the conditions in custody. Over the last months, we have collected dossiers on 50 cases. There is an obvious pattern: the defendant is almost always sentenced to long prison terms and steep fines, usually after a very short trial (often less than an hour), without any reliable evidence and with only questionable translation service. We plan to continue this monitoring in 2017 and will issue a report to be shared with other NGOs and the media to raise awareness about this systemic injustice, which is not only happening in Greece. The prosecution of innocent individuals must cease. The EU must not be allowed to make an example of these alleged human smugglers: the legal rights of the defendants are not being observed and the real smugglers are not being stopped.



**Children's Olympics at Pikpa**

## Peace Education

In the summer of 2016 the German Mennonite Peace Committee (DMFK) organised two youth summer camps to introduce young people aged 17 to 23 to Christian peace work. Peace is not merely an abstract goal; it becomes real when it is embedded in social life. That includes educating our youth about the meaning of peace, about non-violent ways of struggle, about working for justice and undoing oppressions. Part of the program for these youth groups included meetings with CPT. Our team taught the groups about its work, about its positive experiences and the present challenges. This cooperation was an encouraging step of working towards peace that inspired many young participants to become active themselves.

## Financial Summary

Because our volunteers paid for their own flights to Lesbos and worked for only a very small stipend, we were able to provide a strong presence on Lesbos with only a shoestring budget. We are proud of the amount that we were able to achieve in spite of the limited funding that was available.

2016 Plan	(in Euros)	Jan 1st, 2017 (actual)	(in Euros)
Projekt planning	2,000.00	Planning, van transport	483.14
Travel costs of coord.	2,000.00	Travel costs of coord.	3,300.95
Food, lodging, rent	9,800.00	Food, lodging, rent	8,232.90
Communications	1,200.00	Printing costs	124.99
Car rental	1,000.00	Car rental	1,210.57
Coordinators costs	2,000.00	Personnel, coordinators	3,200.00
Film work (not originally budgeted)	—	Film production	2,350.00
Legal support (not originally budgeted)	—	Legal support	1,161.00
Administration, team travel	5,000.00	Administration, team travel	2,950.00
Expenses of volunteers	3,000.00	Expenses of volunteers	2,840.00
TOTAL	26,000.00		25,853.55

## Problems and Lessons Learned

As in every group activity and every project there are aspects of the work that function well and others that do not. For the sake of transparency and to improve our work we will note two major challenges that the team and coordinators faced in the last year. These experiences can be used by coordinating groups to optimize the work in the future.

Peace work relies to a high degree on mutual trust and solidarity: qualities that are not highly valued in the market economy. When financial contracts play a role in peace work, these two worlds can collide. This is what we discovered when we agreed to a verbal contract for a video production. This proved to be a mistake, compounded by the kind of miscommunication that can take place under any circumstances. Peace and justice activists are not focussed on finances (there are much better ways to make money!), but in our work it is important to agree on written contracts, even with those partners who stand in solidarity with the goals of our work. The contract should include a course of action in case of contract violation. The same is true for borrowing larger items like a vehicle. If a privately-owned team car is used, the coordination team must inform itself about possible regulations when fines need to be paid.

The coordination team must also pay great attention to the timing and selection of team members. When the project restarts, only a minimal number of persons is needed. This past summer was very different from the last one: our team planned for a high number of refugees. But the situation was at first quieter than expected and Pikpa, our main partner, had dozens of "voluntourists" working on site. As a consequence, we were unable to provide sufficient work for volunteers without special skills during July and August. In fact, the winter months are actually more crucial for CPT. In the winter, there are only a few volunteers left and our presence is more needed.

Of course, the refugee situation on the Mediterranean is unstable and can change quickly. In the future the goal should be to develop a more dynamic team structure, for example having some persons "on call" in case a larger team is needed, but focussing on a small group of experi-

enced, well-trained CPTers with language skills. Our goal is to establish a year-round presence and work long-term with local partners.

## **Thanks and Acknowledgments**

We wish to thank our partners at Lesbos Solidarity for their continuing solidarity with us. We consider it an honour to accompany you in your remarkable work, which has restored hope and confidence for many people.

We would also like to express our thanks to our lawyer, Ekaterina Pan-giotou, for her excellent support. Katerina answered our many legal questions, guided us through the Greek court system and made it possible for us to attend trials, visit prisoners and begin research on the situation of imprisoned refugees.

Of course we must express our deep thanks to all of our volunteers, who donated their time, passion and energy to this project. Without your willingness to perform this work without remuneration we would not have been able to achieve nearly as much. These thanks go to Dar-ek Firla, Ronbir Mohammad, Peggy Gish, Lisa Trocchia-Balkits, Ivars Balkits, Inger Styrbjörn, Annelies Klinefelter, Harky Klinefelter, Milena Rincon, Luise Blickensdörfer, Rosemarie Milazzo, Sarah Thompson, Michaela Whitton, Hadje Sadje, Jonathan Hege, Tabea Lösel, Aaron Kaufmann and Krystyna Firla.

And finally we wish to express our heartfelt gratitude to all persons and organisations that provide financial support to this work. These donations make it possible to welcome refugees with kindness and dignity in Europe.

## Contact us and stay informed

You can contact CPT Europe at several of our offices:

Germany: [cpt@dmfk.de](mailto:cpt@dmfk.de)

England: [uk@cpt.org](mailto:uk@cpt.org)

Netherlands: [irene@cpt-nl.org](mailto:irene@cpt-nl.org)

As well, we report regularly on the refugee situation on Lesbos on our Facebook page: [www.facebook.com/CPTEurope](https://www.facebook.com/CPTEurope) and on our blog: [www.cptmediterranean.wordpress.com](http://www.cptmediterranean.wordpress.com)

You can also find out more about CPT's major projects in Palestine, Iraqi Kurdistan, Colombia and among the Indigenous Peoples of North America here: [www.cpt.org](http://www.cpt.org)



*(l. to r.) Hannah Rosenfeld, Juliane Assmann, Ronbir Mohammed, Ramyar Hassani, Darek Firla and J. Jakob Fehr*

## Donations and Further Information

CPT Europe has just decided to expand its work on Lesbos to run year-round! To make this possible, we request your financial support. We believe, as do our local partners, that the work of international observers and contributors are vital to the success of local projects on the island.

You can donate by bank transfer to the following address. Be sure to state clearly the intended use of your donation.

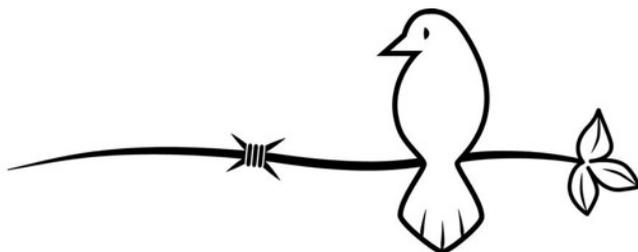
DMFK  
IBAN: DE 4662 0500 0000 2124 0069  
BIC: HEISDE66  
Stichwort: CPT Europa

Christian Peacemaker Teams has its main offices in Chicago and can be contacted here:

P.O. Box 6508  
Chicago, IL, 60680 USA  
Tel: 773-376-0550  
[www.cpt.org](http://www.cpt.org)

In Germany CPT is supported by:

Deutsches Mennonitisches Friedenskomitee  
Hauptstrasse 1  
69245 Bammental, Germany  
Tel: +49 6223 970898  
[www.cpt.org/de](http://www.cpt.org/de)  
[cpt@dmfk.de](mailto:cpt@dmfk.de)



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