



christian peacemaker teams

CPT Europe Lesbos Project Annual Report 2016

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1. Introduction to CPT

Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT) is a peace building organization that partners with local communities to strengthen human rights and work nonviolently against oppression, violence and war.

CPT places teams at the invitation of local peacemaking communities that are confronting situations of possibly lethal conflict. These teams seek to follow God's Spirit as it works 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.

CPT is inspired by the witness of Jesus and of many individuals and groups who are working nonviolently to reclaim their dignity and human rights.

1.1 CPT Mediterranean

Since CPT got invited to Lesbos in 2014, we have worked alongside local partners to accompany and protect refugees. We believe in the freedom of movement and in a world without borders. Migration is a very human phenomenon and should not be criminalized, especially in cases of flight from war and persecution. Within the last two years, especially during the enormous crisis in 2015, we are proud to have established a lasting partnership with the Greek network "Lesbos Solidarity". (In early 2016 this name was adopted to replace the former name "Village of All Together".)

Why are we on Lesbos?

Today's wealth of the global North is built upon colonialism and exploitation which are causing and accepting poverty, wars, unemployment and lack of prospects for the majority of the world population. Apart from refugees who escape war, torture, persecution, we believe that every person should have the right to the same chances for a fulfilled life. In a world full of walls, this is not possible. We cannot live in Fortress Europe which is shutting out the people of the very same countries we invaded one or two centuries ago — very likely causing many of today's problems. 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 receive protection, especially since it is founded upon an appeal to the fundamental human right to apply for asylum.

2015 EU policies have not changed for the better for refugees, but have actually deteriorated. Thousands are stranded in Turkey, Greece, the Baltic countries and North African countries. Nobody knows what will happen to them and when — their lives are

stuck in limbo. Which is why we have maintained our presence on Lesbos even though the media have mostly left again. As we try to show in the graphic below, in the end our small-step efforts aim for a EU-wide policy change and a change in mindset.

Impact Chain

INPUTS

team on site + CPT-network in Europe and around the world

OUTPUTS

PR: Blog, Social Media, Report on court cases

concrete participation in partner's projects (PIKPA), especially when voluntourists are low (winter-time)

personal encounter with real persons that are refugees

OUTCOMES

public pressure to act, mirroring of Europe's failure to meet own moral standards and unmasking double standards

support for and solidarity with Greek partners, deepening partnership, humanitarian aid for refugees

Human face to the refugee crisis, sensibilisation, personal connection, impact in own personal networks

Undoing of Fortress Europe: in people's minds, actions and finally policy change

IMPACT

There are two centres for refugees on Lesbos. The official reception center on Lesbos, Moria, was turned into a so-called "hotspot" in early 2016, and has been permanently overcrowded. The political authorities are permanently overstrained and unable to provide for basic humanitarian needs. The alternative welcoming camp "Pikpa", organized by our local partner Lesbos Solidarity, has become more important than ever, especially for vulnerable cases.

In 2016, the Greek courts intensified its use of court cases against alleged human smugglers. Mostly 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.

This report serves as a documentation of the efforts and activities of the CPT Lesbos team in 2016.

3. Developments on Lesbos

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 who 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 2,761 Syrians from Turkey¹, while millions of migrants have to live in harsh conditions in



Turkey and thousands of migrants still await their process in the hotspots in Greece. This new admission process serves to sort out the vulnerable cases, who are allowed to file an asylum application in Greece, from the non-vulnerable ones who will then be put on a waiting list for deportation back to Turkey.

One of these hotspots in which the refugees have to wait is Moria on Lesbos. With a capacity for 3,000 people but at most times more than 5,000 detained persons, the camp is constantly overcrowded. Unlike in 2015, the refugees are not allowed to travel to the mainland, but have to wait on the island for their asylum processes. This means they have to wait for an unlimited amount of time, many of them for a year now, while nobody informs them about the process on their asylum procedures.

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 — but still, the camp of Moria cannot provide appropriate living conditions for these people. Many have to live in tents even in the winter and snow, there is almost no access to running water or electricity and even doctors and lawyers have only limited 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. Even in the summer, only 2 liters of water were provided per person for drinking, cooking and washing. Furthermore, throughout the year, there have been reports of expired food, maggots and

¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/dec/08/eu-met-only-5-of-target-for-relocating-refugees-from-greece-and-italy>

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

4. Our Team's Activities

In 2016 our team started its presence beginning in June and maintained a constant presence on Lesbos until February 2017, with only a 2-week interruption over Christmas. The team varied in strength between 2 and 6 volunteers, who came from 12 different countries and 4 continents.

Lesbos Solidarity — In October, Efi Latsoudi, representing Lesbos Solidarity, received the international UNHCR Nansen Refugee Award, in recognition of the immense efforts of the organisation to give back some dignity to the stranded humans on Lesbos. We are very proud and thankful to be a partner of such a great initiative that has worked towards refugee rights for 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 shaped by an atmosphere of respect and dignity. 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 could also supported Pikpa by accompanying refugees 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 have been in the water just for recreation, open water has become an image of horror for some. 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. Getting in touch with the water also meant to get in touch with their own experiences and at the same time. The programme taught children, women and men a skill that is mostly expected throughout Europe. Since the swimming lessons were part of the offered program at Pikpa, our team could assist regularly with the lessons. After all, four lifeguards are insufficient to keep an eye on 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 the more sleep-depriving tasks was the night shift with the lifeguards 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 boat arrivals, 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 prepared, as well as at least one person capable of speaking Arabic or Farsi to communicate with the new arrivals.



Media and Political Work — A large part of our work consists in sharing the stories we see and hear and thereby, 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), we bring Lesbos closer to people around the world and work towards understanding and solidarity. Sharing our experiences also increases the public pressure for the decision-makers in the EU. They can ignore the

suffering of migrants when it happens unobserved, but when public attention is brought to bear on a crisis, the authorities have difficulty explaining their failure to act.



On **World Refugee Day** (June 20) we organised a public action demanding safe passage for asylum seekers. Forbidding refugees from travelling 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 that build actual fences and walls. To remind the public of the possibility of change, we went to Sappho Square in the center of

Mytilene. We then walked through the streets of Mytilene thanking the local Greeks for their support during the 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 are still welcoming.

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” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3uIJZN9UtOU&feature=youtu.be>). We will use it for fundraising as well as for CPT introductions in the future.

Legal Monitoring — Since our first year on Lesbos in 2014 we have seen individual refugees being convicted of human smuggling, even though they only steered the refugee boat — in some cases they were forced at gunpoint to take the helm. Since EU policies aim at combatting smugglers instead of providing safe passage, the Greek coast guard has regularly arrested the persons 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 human smuggling.

This year 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 the translation during and after trial. We have visited detainees in prisons in 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 high fines, after a very short trial, without any reliable evidence and with only questionable translation service. We are currently working on publishing a report and will share it with other NGOs and

the media to raise awareness for this systemic injustice, which is not only happening in Greece. The prosecution of innocent individuals has to stop. 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, it does not keep refugees from seeking safety in Europe and the real smugglers are not being stopped either.

Peace Education — This summer, the German Mennonite Peace Committee (DMFK) organised two youth summer camps to introduce young people to Christian peace work. Peace will only be possible if all of us work towards it, and for that to happen we need to educate our youth about the meaning of peace, about nonviolent ways of struggle, about working for justice and undoing oppressions. Part of the program included meetings with CPT. Our team told the groups about its work, about its positive experiences and their challenges. This cooperation was an encouraging step of working towards peace that inspired many participants to get active themselves.



5. Financial Report

	Estimate from Jan 2016	Budget 12/31/16
Project Planning	2,000.00	—
Transport	4,000.00	3,300.95
Food and Living Expenses	9,800.00	8,232.90
Communication	2,200.00	124.99
Team Car	—	1,693.71
Team Coordinators	—	3,200.00
Film	—	2350.00
Lawyer	—	1,161.20
Organizational Costs	8,000.00	5,040.00
Money on Team	—	750.00
TOTAL	26,000.00	25,853.75

6. Problems and Lessons Learned

As in every group and in every project, there are aspects of the work that function well and others that do not. To improve our work we will list some of the larger and smaller challenges that the team and coordinators faced in the last year for the next coordinators to be aware of.

Our biggest mistake was not having made a contract for the video production by a filmmaker. Circumstances change and relationships do, too, especially when there's money involved. Our lesson learned: even when someone claims to work in solidarity with the team, always establish a written contract with services owed and all financial terms explicit. 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.

Another thing the coordination team should pay attention to next time is when and how to put people on team: In the beginning, when the team is being set up, only a minimal number of persons is needed. This summer also was very different from the last one, it was a lot more quiet and Pikpa, our main partner, had dozens of voluntourists who wanted to be put to work. As a consequence, we had too many persons on team in July and August. Of course, the situation in the Mediterranean is not stable and can change quickly — it could be worth it to think about a more dynamic team structure, for example having some “on call” in case a larger team is needed. The winter months actually are more crucial for CPT if we want to be a long-term partner. In the winter, there are only few volunteers left and our presence is more needed.

This year, it seems, we had more external volunteers than usual; people who had not worked with CPT before and were unfamiliar with CPT's work style, our mission and our values. In spite of having informed these volunteers in advance, expectations on both sides were disappointed, leading to considerable conflict and in some cases making life on team and the communication between the team and the coordinators very difficult. In the future, we should be clearer on the direct nature of the work (e.g. that it can be quiet sometimes as well) and the expectations of team members. Working within the roles we have in the team, like blogging, social media and even cleaning, should not be obligatory but tasks everybody on team can and will take on.

7. Thanks/Acknowledgments

First of all we want to thank our partners from Lesbos Solidarity. It is an honour to stand with you during the uplifting and hope-bringing work that you do. We are grateful that you welcome us again and again as equal partners and trust us with assisting you — it is thanks to you that work almost never feels like work!

We would also like to thank our lawyer, Katerina Panagiotou, for the amazing job she has done for us. She has helped us with all our legal questions, found out all the important information on trial dates and detainees and was crucial for conducting our legal monitoring and research.

And last but not least, we are infinitely grateful to all our awesome volunteers who gave their time, passion and energy to this project! Without you, this project cannot happen. Thank you: Darek Firla, Ronbir Mohammad, Luise Blickensdörfer, Rosemarie Milazzo, Sarah Thompson, Michaela Whitton, Hadje Sadjje, Peggy Gish, Lisa Trocchia-Balkits, Ivars Balkits, Inger Styrbjörn, Annelies Klinefelter, Harky Klinefelter, Milena Rincon, Jonathan Hege, Tabea Lösel, Aaron Kaufmann, Krystyna Firla.

8. Further Information

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You can find further information about our project by joining us on Facebook:

www.facebook.com/CPTEurope,

or by reading our internet blogs.

English-language blog: www.cptmediterranean.wordpress.com

German-language blog: www.cptlesbosprojekt.wordpress.com

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or by financing the costs of one of our team members.