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# 3-MONTH REPORT

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*Centar za nenasilnu akciju (Centre for Nonviolent Action) is a non-governmental and non-profit organisation whose basic goals are peace building, the development of civil society, cross-border cooperation and promotion of nonviolence.*

*Our main activity is to organise and implement trainings (seminars) in nonviolent conflict transformation and to support groups and individuals who wish to do this kind of work. Through training in nonviolent conflict transformation we are aiming to develop political awareness of the training participants, and to pass on skills in nonviolent dealing with conflict. At our trainings CNA gathers people from all parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia and Montenegro and Macedonia, hence giving special focus on networking, and communication between people from different areas, whose communication has been interrupted through war and supporting the process of prejudice reduction and trust building.*

*CNA started with its work in 1997 with Sarajevo office. Office in Belgrade started in 2001. CNA is an external branch of KURVE Wustrow.*

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

Dear friends,

Past three months were quite lively and active in both our offices. Here is the report on what we have been doing as well as a summary of some of our reflections and dilemmas with respect to the context of work on peace building in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in the wider region of former Yugoslavia.

This entire period of time has been marked with our intensive work on dealing with the past. After having completed two panel discussions in Bosnia and Herzegovina (in Zenica and in Banja Luka) and implementation of a five-day training with the participants of wars (in Ulcinj, Montenegro, from April 30 to May 6) we were aware that our work in this field was no longer a "new" activity, in which we made some "pioneer steps". It has been more than a year since we started working on dealing with the past.

We realize that this period means no more than just an opening of some questions and a moderate beginning of work on some painful issues. We think that after 6 panels we organized and many media appearances we had, we have a much bigger responsibility to our local communities when it comes to insisting on further work in this area. With respect to that, we have the right to higher expectations from these communities as well. We expect to get more support and initiative, more constructive criticism that helps us to change approaches and search for the most suitable ones, more readiness to confront predominant system of values (mistrust and prejudices towards the ones from the "other side", being buried in the role of the victim, unwillingness to reconsider the crimes made in "our" behalf ...).

Organization and implementations of the panels in Bosnia and Herzegovina were accompanied with an intense presence of CNA in media of both entities of Bosnia and Herzegovina. It's been the first time that our organization became visible and present in media, which is certainly an influential position. The new challenge of public appearances is ahead of us with the main question: how to present "peace story" and bring it closer to the wider audience. We think that there's a great need for further work on this issue.

The fourth Training for Trainers program that lasted for a whole year has been finished with its eighth phase - a three-day evaluation training in Ulcinj, Montenegro). We are highly satisfied with what's been accomplished after such a long process. Organization of five training events created by the participants, cooperation between people who went through our previous Training for Trainers programs, initiatives for some new, future activities etc. - empower us and give us a great boost shot before the beginning of another, fifth Training for Trainers program which will begin in the next month.

Social and political context of the last trimester was very much shaped by an escalation of violence that culminated with the assassination of Serbian Prime minister Zoran Đinđić, in March. The consequences of his murder had an impact on the entire region. It became quite clear that there was a connection between certain political circles and criminal structures. That criminal and political symbiosis seems to be the only one that hasn't had any obstacles to "cooperate" across the border lines, which is certainly a great disgrace for all our societies.

Bosnia and Herzegovina signed the agreement with USA that it would not deliver American citizens accused of war crimes in front of the international courts. It is

another example of a great violence that has been legalized and institutionalised, which further relativize the issue of conviction, re-examination and processing of war crimes, while the citizens of this country should convince themselves that even crimes will be “democratic and human”, if they are American, of course. It is even more absurd when we know that the USA is amongst those most in favour of capturing and extraditing war criminals from this region.

In spite all of that, we continue to “make waves” and raise tough issues and it seems that we have all the reasons to believe our area of work and capacities are increasing.

## 2. MAIN ACTIVITIES

### 2.1. Panel Discussions «four Views: from the Past - me in the War - how to reach sustainable Peace» in Bosnia and Herzegovina

#### Preparation phase

During the phase of preparations that had preceded the implementation of the panels, we were focused on search for former soldiers who were willing to take part in the panels, search for the moderators of the panels and on meetings and the exchange of ideas with local partners.

We were looking for participants through some personal contacts and during our visits to the War Veterans’ Associations in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The important segment we had planned for this phase of the program was the training for participants of wars that was supposed to precede the panels. The training had the following goals: trust building between participants, thorough exchange of opinions between former soldiers about the project, getting to know the participants with peace work and their recognition of their own potentials that they could focus on peace process.

Due to the delayed response of the donors who were financially supporting the organization of the training, it was postponed for the end of April and the beginning of May. This phase was spent in meetings between soldiers and CNA team members and later with moderators as well. The work was focused on introducing participants to each other, trust building amongst them as well as on “tough questions” which could be asked by the audience that we composed having in mind our last year’s experience from the panels in Serbia.

We had a group of 5 ex-soldiers, who were coming from different sides, from the region of Bosnia and Herzegovina, who were ready to discuss their motivation to join the military units, emotional turmoil within themselves, and the events they had been through during the war. Unlike the panels in Serbia, where we had had participants from Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, in these



panels we wanted to include just people from Bosnia and Herzegovina because we thought there were plenty of important dilemmas and problems regarding the war that needed to be opened within the society of Bosnia and Herzegovina. It would certainly be very useful to compare different needs for regional and local approach to the idea of panel discussions with former soldiers.

### **Panels**

The first panel "Four views: from the past - me in the war, to the future - how to reach sustainable peace" was held in Zenica, Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, on March 15, 2003. The participants were: Adnan Hasanbegović, Nermin Karačić - both from Sarajevo, former members of Bosnia and Herzegovina Army, Romeo Zelenika from Mostar, a former member of the Croatian Defence Council and Novak Grbić from Banja Luka, a former member of the Republic of Srpska Army.

It was our first panel in Bosnia and Herzegovina and we were a bit afraid if the audience would come at all. About one hundred people came to the panel which took place in the Old People's Home in Zenica. They were mostly young people and NGO activists, and just a very few of those who had been direct participants of the war or who had been on the battlefield, whom we were expecting. We would have experienced their appearance as a support and a clear signal that there was a space for this story within those usually quite closed circles of people. But we did not get that kind of support and understanding for our message from those organizations. We did receive it mostly from individuals, while the institutional support was missing. It is however important that there weren't any attempts of obstruction of panels from those circles. On the other hand, it would have meant a lot to us if we had managed to encourage former soldiers to start creating and implementing similar projects by themselves. In our opinion, within the processes of peace building there is and must be some space for people who were directly involved in the war events and took part in armed conflicts.

The panel consisted of three parts: participants' stories about their feelings and dilemmas regarding the war, their views and reflections on the possibility of building of sustainable peace in this region and finally questions from the people in the audience.

The complexity of the story itself, and the fact that this was the first public appearance for most of the participants, contributed to confusion and some sort of fear of public appearance which were obvious. The participants dealt with those difficulties in various ways (with humour or by showing their emotions in a transparent way in some moments ...)

We think that a lot was accomplished by the sole fact that four soldiers who had just recently belonged to belligerent armies, sat together as a team to talk about themselves and their experiences of war in an open way and to discuss their views of sustainable peace in this region. What we were missing was more criticism regarding one's own responsibility and regarding the crimes committed in "my name". We are aware that it's a long and painful process, and that it is often extremely hard to deal with this problem in public. At the same time it is very important to deliver messages like these in panel discussions which we organize, so that they really contribute to the work on dealing with the past. The question is how to accomplish that and open up space for dealing with problems of personal and collective responsibility? It remains our priority in creating future activities in the area of dealing with the past.

The war left some deep and painful consequences for the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Every person and every place have their own complicated story that continues to influence their lives. All the more so it was important to us to feel how attentively and inquisitively the audience was listening to the stories of participants which were sometimes too long and time-consuming. Although we informed the police about the event on time, and got their promise that

they would provide protection in an adequate way, according to their duties, none of the police officers showed up. We find the cooperation with local institutions and police forces to be one of the important segments of the project due to the fact that it would send a message to the public that we are not alone in this process and that we have their support.

The second panel which was held in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the first one in Republic of Srpska took place in Banja Luka, on March 30.

Although it was far less attended than the one in Zenica, the very place where the panel was held - the festive room of the Banski dvori palace was in a way the signal to the local community that there was a need for an open attitude towards the activities of this kind and that they needed to be done with a certain cooperation of local authorities.

Just like the previous one, this panel also consisted of three parts.

Participants of the panel were: Novak Grbić from Banja Luka and Dušan Šehovac from Sarajevo, former members of the Republic of Srpska Army, Adnan Hasanbegović from Sarajevo, former member of the Bosnia and Herzegovina Army and Romeo Zelenika from Mostar, an ex member of the Croatian Defence Council.

Stories of participants were more complete, better shaped and told with more concentration, although one could occasionally notice the tendency to even out the horrors of war ("it was hard for all of us").

The atmosphere in the audience was pleasant and there were plenty of constructive questions and comments.

Some of the questions asked on the panels (for example the one which was asked on both panels was the following: "If it was 1991-1992 and you had today's experience, would you go to war again?" or an important question that was asked on the panel in Banja Luka: "Do you think that there's peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina at the moment and what indicates to that?") together with the participant's answers to them illustrate quite well the present relations between the members of the major ethnic groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina. All of that, however, put the event in a realistic milieu. It encouraged us further to think about more thorough and focused preparations of the participants for the panels in order to help them deal with the "difficult issues" and to focus their stories to peaceful goals.



### **Local Partners**

During the phase of preparations for panels it was very difficult to find people who were ready to engage in the process of organization of panels together with us and to work on development of ideas related to the process of dealing with the past.

People mostly answered that there was a great need for this kind of work, but the time wasn't right and that there weren't good conditions since people weren't ready to process it yet.

The decision to have the panels in Zenica and Banja Luka primarily came out from the readiness, motivation and enthusiasm of people from the following organizations: Sezam from Zenica and Centre for Informative Decontamination of Youth from Banja Luka who supported this project and accepted to organize it together with CNA.

We had a feeling that due to various fears they had had not all our local partners were ready to fully join the process of the implementation of panel discussions.

Geographical distance between our local partners and us caused some difficulties regarding the communication due to different views on some issues.

All of this helped us draw some learning points regarding the need for further work on development of modes of cooperation with our local partners, because the preparation process was in some moments quite hard and very frustrating for all of us.

During the organization of the panels local partners had confrontations with their environment.

It was a brave step for people from partner organizations to get involved in this project and take the risk of organizing the panel despite their fears. One should bear in mind that people from the partner organizations are the ones who will stay in their communities after such events and who will have to deal with the reactions of those provoked by the panels and by the opening of some painful issues.

We see that our local partners are motivated and ready to continue their work on dealing with the past. Just as one of our friends from Sezam said during the evaluation we had together: "It's been a long time since I felt this alive. Again I feel that I'm doing something that I am going to see. I expected something to move, and it was important that we did something.

This dealing with the past is needed, we are at the beginning and a lot more could be done. I'm willing to be a part of this in the future, too."

## **Media**

Although we were a bit sceptical with respect to the most popular media's interest in peace work, when the panels were over, we were pleasantly surprised with the space we were given in media. After two panels which were very well covered by both state owned and independent media, participants and organizers from CNA appeared in two TV shows that we experienced as two more panels which took place in front of the much bigger audience. Those were: "Dileme" on Federal TV and "Buka" on Alternative TV from Banja Luka, both of which cover political events. This confirms us that the media recognised our work, helped us to promote our idea and in a certain way became our partners in the peace process. There's certainly more room for the values of peace work in media all across Bosnia and Herzegovina. We expect to "take over" that space together with the initiative of people who work in media, who would not just have the role of those who cover the events, but also create and initiate them on their own. That is why in the future we would like to work more with journalists on educational programs that should increase the level of sensitization for these issues.

## **Learning Points**

In our opinion, a lot has been accomplished with the mere fact that five former soldiers from different sides sat together willing to talk about themselves and feelings they were having in the war. It takes a lot of courage to do that, because it wasn't easy for some participants to return to their towns and deal with the reactions of people from their communities. Ever since the phase of preparations of panels, some participants were under the various forms of pressure from their

environment (they were receiving calls from people from some political parties and Veterans' associations who did not approve of them "sitting with the enemy" etc.)

We still need to think about system of support that we can provide for the participants in order to empower them and make it easier for them to deal with those pressures.

Stories we got from participants were honest and human but not all that re-examining when it comes to re-considering the war, one's own responsibility, responsibility of one's side in the war and for the war.

However, the question is if that is enough? Is that what we wanted? What is the mechanism that can start the dealing process and what does the phrase dealing with the past mean to the people at all?

The question remains how to empower local organizations and individuals to join the similar work process more openly and willingly.

One of the important learning points we've had before the beginning of the next round of panels which is going to take place in Serbia and Montenegro is related to the necessity of an additional training with warriors where they will be acquainted with the peace work and possible models of their participation in it. It will also include further work on sensitizing for various forms of violence and on re-examination of their own responsibility.

Another important learning point for us from the CNA team is the fact that, however satisfied we are with what we've accomplished, we came out of this process feeling extremely exhausted and stressed out. Although we took care of each other and gave each other support as much as we could, it seemed that the pace was just too tough. The question is where we are with our own needs, emotions and micro processes that are going on within ourselves. One of the important points that we need to work on in the future is finding ways to deal with the stress, exhaustion and frustrations that come out of this process and not just on the individual level, but on the level of the entire organization and the entire network of people who are doing this work.

## **2.2. Report for the first Part of the Training for the Participants of Wars**

The Training for the participants of wars in the region of former Yugoslavia was held in Ulcinj, Montenegro, from April 30 to May 6. The group of participants consisted of 10 former soldiers from Croatia, Serbia, Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Many of those people are activists of various associations of veterans and disabled veterans, as well as NGOs (Demokratska inicijativa sarajevskih Srba - Democratic Initiative of Serbs from Sarajevo, Udruženje boraca rata Medveđa - Soldiers' Association of Medveđa, Udruga branitelja Hrvatske - Association of Defenders of Croatia, Udruga Bošnjaka branitelja domovinskog rata Hrvatske - Association of Bosniak Defenders of the Croatian Homeland War, Centar za mirovne studije - Centre for Peace Studies, Udruga dragovoljaca i veterana domovinskog rata hrvatske republike Herceg Bosne - Association of Volunteers and Veterans of the Homeland War of the Croat Republic of Herzeg Bosnia). The training team included people from both CNA offices (Adnan, Ivana, Nenad and Tamara) and also our long-time colleague and friend Goran Božičević who's presently working for the Quaker Peace and Social Witness.

The activity of this type is something new for all of us, since all the contacts and cooperation we've had with this target group so far, were based either on sporadic participation of some former soldiers on our basic training events or on organization of public debates with participants of wars. Those are the activities whose nature doesn't leave too much room for a deeper and more thorough exchange of views, experiences and opinions. The need for such training came up after we had organized



the first round of "Four Views" panels. That's when we realised that there wasn't enough space and time for a more intense work with participants on the issues of responsibility for wars and violence and on further work on building the sustainable peace in this region. That is why we decided to organize this kind of meeting with former participants of wars, with several basic goals:

- Exchanging experiences and opinions between peace activists and former soldiers, and work on tearing down the stereotype that only peace activists are for peace, and the warriors are for war
- Including former soldiers into peace processes and bringing peace activities closer to this part of the population
- Sensitizing for violence and its consequences (from personal towards social level)
- Forming a group of ex-soldiers which would be a basis for the teams of participants of the future panels

The basic difficulty we encountered while we were organizing this seminar was how to gather a group in such a short notice. It turned out that the task wasn't simple at all, for many reasons: the feeling of apathy and non-motivation for any kind of social engagement (especially since the engagement was not recognized as a concrete humanitarian aid to the population of former soldiers); pressure and misunderstandings of the local community with respect to participation in peace activities (which are often perceived as profitable and non-patriotic); pressures on people because of their contacts with the "enemy side"; personal and professional commitments, etc.

After many difficulties and troubles, we formed a group of ten participants. At first it seemed too small, especially with respect to the training team made of five people. However, during the work process it turned out that the smaller group was easier to work with, especially because of the specific target group and the sensitivity of the issues we were working on, and because it was easier to build a safe space within the group, which was necessary for an open discussion about issues of past and future.

During five working days the following themes were covered and the issues were opened: communication, perception, violence, personal experiences related to the war, peace building, simulation of panels, fears and expectations regarding the participation in the process of dealing with the past.

It turned out that the worries of the training team regarding the methodological approach to the group that was rather unfamiliar with the work in the workshops were unfounded because participants' high motivation contributed to the dynamic workshops and ample discussions. It was noticeable that there wasn't enough time to cover all the points that were opened in the discussions. The workshops lasted up to 4 hours and it was our impression that regardless of the exhausting pace of the workshops, the group needed to open up some issues and dedicate enough time to them. We didn't expect that participants would have such a transparent need to be heard, to ask questions to one another, to speak and listen, to meet each other in the first place. We thought we would have to encourage them much more and to work longer to build the group and create space for open communication.

There were moments when discussions became highly emotional, especially during the exchange of personal experiences related to the war and that whole period of time.

The special segment (level) of work on this seminar was dedicated to the issue of personal responsibility for the war and for the violence that comes with it, and with respect to that was the work on the problems of "law, orders and conscience". It seems to us that those are the pressing problems that need to be worked on a lot and that this work must be done with a readiness to re-examine one's own position, actions and non-actions. Only after those points are processed and reviewed - public appearances like the panels we organize, can accomplish a desired, strong impact on the audience.

We will have a chance to work on those and other important issues in the second part of this training which is going to take place in Bjelašnica, in the middle of June.

After the end of the training we have a feeling that an important thing has been done with this activity, with respect to establishment of closer connection between the population of former soldiers and peace initiatives and that a strong impulse was given for various activities in the area of peace building and dealing with the past, in the local communities. At the same time, there's a strong feeling that this is just the beginning of a long lasting and a very painful process in which we do not want to be alone. Therefore, we hope that after the first phase of the training, we've shared some responsibility for it with the participants of this seminar.

### **3. APENDIX**

#### **3.1. About the Idea and the Context of Work in Bosnia and Herzegovina<sup>1</sup>**

Two panel discussions titled «For Views» (From the past - How I found myself in war; towards the future - How to reach sustainable peace), were held in Zenica and Banja Luka, in March.

Behind this long and quite a descriptive title, there is an idea of activists of Centre for Nonviolent Action to initiate a particular process in the field of Dealing with the Past. It is specific because its direct carriers and protagonists are former soldiers, people who participated in wars that took place in the region of former Yugoslavia, during the nineties. They have seldom been given a public space to talk about their war experiences, motivation, views of the future of our countries and societies and the obstacles and needs that lie ahead, on the path to sustainable peace in this region.

It's a very large social group, which has often been pushed into the stereotyped position of "those who might talk about the war, but never about peace". We intend to step out of this cliché and create an activity in which veterans can recognize their own capacities for peace activism, re-examine their personal responsibility, as well as call upon serious and thorough review of social and collective responsibility for both the past and the future.

When we implemented the first series of panels "Four Views" in four towns in Serbia, almost a year ago, one of the things people were saying most often was the following: "This should be done everywhere, here, in Bosnia and Herzegovina,

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<sup>1</sup> The text is issued also as the supplement, which we prepared and published in Oslobodjenje and Nezavisne novine daily newspapers. You could find the whole text-supplement on our web-site.

Croatia...” This sentence contains a full range of various emotions - from anger and hurt expressed in the following question: “Are we the only ones that need to deal with it?” to a moving awareness how important it is that we reflect on the most painful issues we live with, within this region and across the state, entity and other borders.

At the end of last year, we decided to continue our work in this field and organize public debates in Bosnia and Herzegovina, knowing that we were about to step into an entirely specific context, strongly shaded with frightening experiences of war, shared by almost all people from Bosnia and Herzegovina. We were aware that this process would demand tackling all kinds of complicated and sensitive issues regarding different experiences and views of the war, national and religious identities and various concepts of future. It was clear that every town and every village in Bosnia and Herzegovina had their own war story, underlined with their history of local relations, “enriched” with the multitude of symbolic connotations that put the entire groups in opposite, immobile positions of victims and criminals, with a certainty that was difficult to reconsider.

However, we were confident we would be able to deal with all that, because our own life stories that had been in various ways and from different aspects, marked with wars in this region and the violence that accompanied them.

That is why we started to travel around Bosnia and Herzegovina, aiming to find allies for the implementation of this idea, people who were willing to share responsibility with us and initiate a small-scale process of dealing with the past and responsibility for violence that had happened in their local communities, and also to find those who were ready to confront a predominant system of values, expressed in the following phrase: “Let’s just not start talking about the war, everything’s clear, anyway”. Our trip included visits to Tuzla, Bijeljina, Zenica, Banja Luka, Gornji Vakuf/Uskoplje, Mostar..., where we visited various organisations and individuals assuming they could be our allies in the work on peace building and dealing with the past. We also tried to establish some new and strengthen the existing connections with the associations of war veteran’s, invalids of war and other organisations that gathered those who had participated in wars. Our organisation recognises media and people who work in this field, as the important carriers of such initiatives. Although the level of media sensitisation for peace work in Bosnia and Herzegovina is rather questionable, we’ve been somewhat surprised with the willingness of some people to offer their candid support to the idea of public debates.

Several important points have become quite clear during many meetings we had. Here they are:

Even mentioning the word WAR provokes tempestuous emotional reactions, especially if this term is not used exclusively in casual expressions like “before or after the war”. Whenever it is used to describe the state, the atmosphere and the essence of the period from 1991-1995, it leads to the conflict whether it was an aggression or a civil war, religious war, war for the fatherland, homeland war, etc. All of it may sound absurd unless one realises that there are real people with their real needs, behind all these phrases and slogans. One of the possible ways to the understanding of their needs is understanding and becoming aware of the violence that was committed and exposing the actual destructiveness of the whirlwind of war in this region. Pain for the lost family members, lost homes and lives we once had is

the same no matter whether it was caused by an aggression or the civil war. No one should claim their exclusive rights to that pain. We should all take over the duty to perceive our own responsibility for the violence this region is fraught with. However, it is necessary to overcome looking at the world through national-coloured glasses that makes our suffering hurt more than those of the others, since their suffering is more or less deserved, anyway.

There's an apparent polarisation of society of Bosnia and Herzegovina which is present in every aspect of life, especially with respect to the past war and the future life together in this country. It is permeated through every level of social and political reality, and the efforts of those who try to overcome it are being outspoken by a prevailing dissonance of various political and ideological concepts, unable to hear anything but their own futile tirades. Those are the very patterns of social relations which generate the strongest pressure on individuals, organisations and institutions that have the power, willingness and knowledge to promote different type of values - those of nonviolence and open dialogue. Judging by our experience, there's still a very few people who are willing to engage in such work, for numerous and complex reasons. One of the main reasons for such restraint is a lack of support from local community and a fear of confrontation with corridors of power (political, economical, criminal) who continue to wage war against their "palls" from the opposite side. We, as a society, should give it some serious thought.

Whereas common citizens have a great need for this kind of approach and readiness to leave a door ajar and uncover some well kept stories that they once locked within themselves. Those stories carry all the bitterness of the war, but also a great potential for peace and nonviolence. The responsibility for empowerment of this potential for peace is just as equally important as it is for dealing with the matters of crimes and wars.

Therefore, if we want sustainable peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia..., we will have to turn to the people in local communities who belong to different social groups and classes and who are clearly aware that the peace is something we all need. One of the reliable indicators we need to have in order to be able to say confidently that we "live peace" is a situation in which Muslims, Catholics and Orthodox live with each other, and not just next to each other. It is a situation in which we clearly express our different nationalities, not allowing for a moment that our identities become a shelter or an alibi for further escalation of violence. That is why peace is not just a cease-fire. It takes much more courage for it than it does for war and it also takes much longer time, than the war does.

*Tamara Šmidling*

## 4. WORK PLAN

For the next three months we plan:

1. *The second part of the training for the participants of Wars (06-09.06.2003.)*
2. *The first three phases of Programme Training for Trainers*
  - I phase - 10-days training (4-14.7.2003)
  - II phase - follow-up meetings (July - August)
  - III phase - 10-days training (22.8-2.9.2003)

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CNA will very much welcome feedback, suggestions, questions and criticism concerning this report and our general work.  
Your thinking along helps us!  
Thank you.

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For Centre for Nonviolente Action

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