

LETTER OF INTENTIONS

To women's and
peace organizations
all over the world

We are impressed by the response of international women and peace movement on the systematic raping of women in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Demonstrations and support actions organized all over Europe encourage us in our work and give us hope that we can strengthen the work on supporting women victims of war. However, we would like to share with you some of our serious concerns.

We are writing this letter because we fear that the process of helping raped women is turning in a strange direction, being taken over by governmental institutions, Ministry of Health of Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, and male gynecologists in particular. We fear that the raped women could be used in political propaganda with the aim of spreading hatred and revenge, thus leading to further violence against women and to further victimization of survivors.

A lot of talks have been done so far, but the concrete outcome is still very poor. Some raped women have presented publicly their tragic experience, hoping to receive more understanding and help; they are disappointed now because they still do not get the needed support. We believe that this sensationalistic journalist approach has frightened and additionally upset the raped women. The atmosphere of heavy time pressure, produced by domestic and international media, demanding Ad Hoc Centers for Help to Raped Women is counter-productive. Raped women will feel the consequences of the crime during their whole lives and deserve appropriate help - not instant solutions. Developing of serious women-support-projects needs understanding of the problem, patience and time. Otherwise, the good intentions could turn out to be useless or even harmful, bringing some relief only to the conscience of the support-givers.

Therefore the women active in peace initiatives decided to make initial steps towards self-organizing of women in refugee camps. On the basis of experience acquired in work with women-victims of violence in Autonomous

Women's House Zagreb, we believe that the first step which is needed very much¹ is establishing communication among women. We are establishing a women's network working on process of trustbuilding by systematic visiting of refugee camps. The shape of the appropriate support to raped women could be defined as a result of learning about the destinies and problems of women in camps. When we find the specific needs of women victims of war, the concrete institutional way of support will be proposed. Before the basic work in camps has been done we can only point out the principles which have to be fulfilled in order to begin with sensible support work:

- support has to be given by women, because only women can understand the deep crisis of the raped women
- the work have to be done by non-governmental organizations to avoid possible misuse of the raped women for political aims
- support should be given to women's non-governmental organizations on the basis of detailed project proposal and clear selection criteria
- possible future centers for the support have to be established in all the states on the territory of former Yugoslavia, as raped women live in all the states
- possible network of centers has to be decentralised and run by women only

Exchange of experiences between the women helping rape victims in different countries and direct support is necessary to build the needed network of volunteer and institutions as soon as possible. Help should be promised and organized on the long-term basis.

Looking forward to our future cooperation.
Zagreb Women's Lobby
Zagreb, December 21, 1992

Women from:

"Independent Alliance of Women of Croatia"

"Autonomous Women's House"

"Informative-documentary Center for Women"

"Antiwar Campaign Croatia"

established "Zagreb Women's Lobby" and "Center for the Support to Women Victims of War and Raped Women" in November 1992