

Friday, October 3rd, 2008

Comments for plenary session

Organization: Civitas-Bosnia and Herzegovina

Delivered by: Rizah Smailbegovic, Associate Director, Civitas BiH

- At the recent Peace Implementation Council meeting it was concluded what we, Bosnian NGOs engaged in education have known all along-education is a security issue, not just a social right-and I can't think of any country in greater need of civic education then Bosnia and Herzegovina
- The organization that I represent, Civitas BiH, and the education for democracy and human rights, have come a long way since 1996, when civic education seeds were planted in BiH as a joint venture of the Center for Civic Education, the United States Information Agency (USIA), and the Council of Europe
- For the past 12 years we have partnered with local and international organizations, governmental agencies and educational institutions to develop and implement quality education programs, teaching materials and teacher training for human rights and democracy education for over 30,000 teachers at the pre-school, primary, secondary and university level, throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH)
- BiH cumbersome government structure makes it almost impossible to adopt policies at the state level and implement them in the school system in the whole country. Instead, Civitas needed to design a systemic approach and good cooperation with the Ministries, Pedagogical institutes and other local and international organizations dealing with education
- OSCE in BiH has led a comprehensive education reform strategy development process, however, it lacked tools to enforce its implementation
- For the time being, Civitas designed "Democracy and Human Rights" is the only subject with a single curriculum in the whole country and it serves as a bonding element and a role model for the rest of the curricula. Teacher certification program was developed to ensure quality teaching content and methods. There are practical results-young activists from all over the country, who participated in our programs, took it one step further and formed Civitas Youth Network. The Netowrk is now working on improvement of communities around the country and is promoting youth activism with its magazine and a TV show
- Civitas developed democracy and human rights course is exposing students to BiH constitution, protections of human rights and roles of citizens in democracy.

It also has a practical part, in which over 50,000 students yearly do hands-on projects interacting with the government. This part is now jeopardized by the ICRC program “Humanitarian law”, which encourages teachers to exclude student projects, very much missing within the BiH school system, in order to make room for their content

- There is a need for the OSCE member countries to put in place policies which would ensure that programs that promote human rights and encourage active citizenship are at the very foundation of curriculum. Since this is a new content teacher professional development should also be mandated and regulated
- There are many positive developments in the field, not the least is the ODIHR funded textbook and teacher training on minorities in BiH, but if there is no action at policy level the best practices from the field will remain just that-until the enthusiasm of teachers and NGO leaders wears out. Currently in BiH, after each elections new education ministers question the necessity of the EDC content and are trying to get rid of it.
- If you are interested to hear more please join us at the breakout session on education in divided societies from 13:00-15:00