

International Witness Team (IWT)

by Katja Tempel

What we find:

Every night many refugees cross the serbian-hungarian border illegally. They are forced to do this because they do not have an access to legal migrant procedures.

More than 50% of them have to suffer some kind of abuse: beatings, water boarding, electro shocks, and massive humiliation.

Article 1 of the United Nations Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment specifies the internationally agreed legal definition of torture:

"Torture means any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him or a third person information or a confession, punishing him for an act he or a third person has committed or is suspected of having committed, or intimidating or coercing him or a third person, or for any reason based on discrimination of any kind, when such pain or suffering is inflicted by or at the instigation of or with the consent or acquiescence of a public official or other person acting in an official capacity. It does not include pain or suffering arising only from, inherent in or incidental to lawful sanctions."

That means:

Hungarian Police is guilty of applying torture on several migrants every night.

There are organizations that monitor the treatment and abuses of refugees at this border. With there publications they already have a big impact on the public opinion in Europe.

Also there is some kind of pressure on the hungarian government from European Parliament and national governments.

But what is missing is real protection for the refugees.

Question:

How can we improve protection of migrants and increase public concern and public exclamation?

An answer could be the establishment of an International Witness Team (IWT).

Method:

Through developing an interventional campaign like IWT the government of Hungary as well as the Border Police (with all associated organisations) will be put under pressure to reduce violence before the teams even start accompanying the migrant groups.

Teams of two international people (called activists) accompany a group of migrants on their way through the border. In case of police detection they lay open their task. Police will apply less violence when they meet the activist.

Aims:

- refugees experience less violence
- activists gain insights in (violent) structures and experiences of people on the run.
- public opinion is changing towards a supporting attitude towards refugees

Political safeguard:

The campaign needs political backing through prominent people of culture, science, political and social life who support the idea and give political and social weight to the campaign. Some of these people build the "face" of the campaign. Preferably a good mixture of known people from countries from where people flee and people from the core of Europe. In big advertisements in newspapers they declare that they support the campaign.

Steps towards a successful campaign:

1. prominent people are found who support the campaign.
2. committed activists are being found.
3. press release and direct (personal) information to Hungarian Government and people in charge for Police missions (Belgrade, Novi Sad, Subotica...)
4. testphase with four groups being accompanied
5. short evaluation
6. start on a larger scale:

aim: all refugee-groups starting from Subotica area crossing the border know of the fact, that they can be accompanied by IWT.

Selection of activists:

- healthy
- fit in physical condition
- prepared to suffer violence
- prepared to suffer uncomfortable conditions
- experience through age, contact with refugees, experience with police violence
- able to communicate in english

Timeline for activists:

Every activist needs 2 weeks time:

- 3 days training, preparation
- 3 days get in contact with groups that cross the border
- 5 days time to cross the border
- 2 days evaluation
- 1 day rehabilitation

Finances:

Every activist covers his/her own costs.

Fund raising is being done for financing the frame and structures of the campaign.

Possible cooperation partners:

Peace Brigades International
<http://www.peacebrigades.org>

KURVE Wustrow (Center for Training and Networking in Nonviolent Action)
<https://www.kurviewustrow.org/?lang=en>

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