

Disability Rights are Human Rights

Landmine Survivors Network Bosnia-Herzegovina (LSN BiH) held its second regional training on advocacy, human rights and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities from September 5-7, 2005, in Banja Luka, Bosnia and Herzegovina. This regional cooperative project, facilitated by trainers from BiH, Croatia, Serbia and Montenegro and Macedonia was made possible with funding from the International Trust Fund.

Sixteen representatives of disabled persons organizations from the region participated in the three-day training, which was held in the brand new and only accessible hotel in the center of Banja Luka, Hotel Vidovic. The participants had an opportunity to learn more about international legal instruments on human rights of persons with disabilities. Domestic legislation affecting persons with disabilities was also discussed, as well as other measures necessary to ensure full participation of persons with disabilities in the life of the community.

The participants were exposed to various advocacy techniques, exchanged information on campaign strategies, coalition building, as well as local, national, regional and global level advocacy efforts, reflecting experiences from participants' every day work. Real-life simulations allowed participants to experience first-hand the obstacles/challenges which arise in presenting

a human rights violation claim to the European Court of Human Rights. Through discussions, participants analyzed ways in which to use international and regional law to ensure enjoyment of human rights for persons with disabilities, as well as how to ensure productive cooperation with the government institutions in the region.

A panel discussion was organized as part of the training on the topic: "Our Convention: Making History." Government representatives from the countries in the region participated in the panel discussion. They presented their experiences as official delegates to the August UN meeting at which negotiations on the draft Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities continued and discussed with the audience next steps in the process, both domestically and internationally.

The training generated a lot of enthusiasm on the part of the participants, who praised, among other things, the methodology using small working groups, where all were given an opportunity to participate. This is apparently an innovation for Bosnia and Herzegovina, despite the enormous increase in international trainings for civil society in this country in the last decade.

The regional participation paid off: participants from all countries in the region understood and

expressed great interest in organizing a network for region-wide campaign for speedy and effective adoption, ratification and implementation of the Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which is anticipated to be finalized by the end of 2006. The high impact human rights training of regional

activists is the second of this type organized by LSN in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and judging by the extremely positive reception of the participants, the region is taking first steps on the road to ensuring full enjoyment of human rights of all persons with disabilities.