

Core Training creates NP History

Romanian Army Assists in Core Training Final Simulation

By: Phil Esmonde, NP Capacity Building Director



The first NP Core training (CT) to be held in Europe (and the seventh training since NP's founding) took place near Sovata, Romania from August 8 – 29 with 19 participants, and for the first time NP received the active cooperation and support from the armed forces of a government.

This Core Training made NP history by conducting a 4 hour end-of-training simulation exercise with the active and enthusiastic support of the Romanian army at its training camp located in Bistrita, about 2 hours away from the main NP training location of Sovata. The army agreed to support and to actively participate in the final simulation to help NP make it more “real” for the future civilian unarmed peacekeepers, especially as dealing with the military is a normal experience in NP field teams.

Participants (and trainers) were all extremely positive and said that working with the army did indeed make it feel more realistic; it also helped and challenged some participants to break their stereotyped views of those in the military. A debriefing by the military and a question and answer period also helped participants (as well as simulation organizers with NP) to get insights into how some aspects of our training are viewed by such an important actor.

Participants clearly showed in this final simulation how they had learnt, developed and integrated new skills, especially how they would act and re-act under stressful and pressured circumstances, how to work well as a team, and how to identify and use their strengths and weaknesses as team members. A primary requirement during the simulation was showing the ability to make decisions quickly and effectively without jeopardizing the lives of those they were assisting, or putting themselves into extremely high risk situations.

The openness and positive response by the Romanian Army was exemplified by the

telephone call we received on the morning of August 30 at the end of the full training: we were informed by the base commander that he has sent copies of the simulation exercise to other army units around Romania, because they were so impressed by the scenario. It seems that this was an historic event for the army, also, as it was the first time they had worked with civilians in an exercise – and they too have learned from the experience. The Peace Action, Training and Research Institute of Romania (PATRIR), the host of the NP training program, will now work to build upon this relationship to develop further joint programs with the Romanian military for training civilian capacities for deployments in conflict areas.

The simulation itself included negotiating safe passage from an IDP camp with a group of UN Peacekeepers, experiencing the (mock) explosion of a landmine, getting held up at a checkpoint and searched, and getting caught in the middle of a rebel attack and needing to run for cover in a bunker.

And so, after almost three weeks of such intense and at times very stressful and demanding training, the 19 participants concluded their training.

This training was conducted with support by the ARCA network (who had received funding from the EU for a series of training workshops) and in partnership with NP member organization PATRIR (Peace Action Training and Research Institute in Romania). PATRIR did an excellent job of on-the-ground organizing and logistics in Romania thanks to the detailed attention of Denisa Brand-Jacobsen and her colleagues.

The overall pre-training organizing also received tremendous support from Lyn Adamson (until June the Interim NP Capacity Building Director), Zahra Ismail (working as an intern with Lyn) and Gilda Bettancourt (with the Capacity Building Department of NP). Lyn and Gilda did most of the screening of applicants, conducted telephone interviews and checked references, while Zahra organized the international travel arrangements and kept up with correspondence.

Key to the training being so successful were the two trainers Robert Rivers and Monica Alfred. Robert and Monica were joined by Angela Pinchero, Field Manager of the NP Sri Lanka project, and Angela added tremendously to the information on how NP actually functions in the field. She also took on responsibility for running some sessions, and became part of the collective training team in many ways.

Robert and Monica did a wonderful and thorough job of training under increased pressure, as one of the trainers, Fatima from South Africa, could not come at the last minute. Others who helped the training process included Kai Brand-Jacobsen (a member of the International Governing Council for NP, and Director of PATRIR) who did two days on conflict analysis and mapping as well as being present for many other sessions and providing input from his field experience in peacebuilding and conflict transformation, and Winnie Romeril who came for two days to conduct a well-received first aid workshop. Petronela Cotolan documented the whole training process for NP.

The Core Training was preceded by a 4-day participatory assessment that took place in the training rooms of PATRIR's International Peace and Development Training Center (IPDCTC) in Cluj. Twenty-two participants took part in the assessment, with a four-person assessment team led by Frode Restad and Lyn Adamson, and supported by Angela Pinchero and Phil Esmonde. Topics covered in the assessment included:

- * Teamwork
- * Communication & Feedback
- * Stress management & self care
- * Nonviolence, Intervention & Non partisanship

The Core Training itself involved the further development of these subjects as well as such subjects as conflict analysis, security and risk assessment, accompaniment and other methods of Third Party Nonviolent Intervention and Civilian Peacekeeping, decision-making under stress, first aid, etc

The group participating in this core training were diversified, represented a variety of skills and experiences, and were highly motivated and committed during the full training. Despite lengthy days and some training evenings (including two other simulations which either woke them up extremely early or took place throughout the night), there remained a high level of energy, and a wonderful sense of humour throughout.

The training included 8 women and 11 men from Kenya, Italy, Brazil, Norway, Tanzania, Uganda, Togo, North America, Egypt, and Germany. They included a psychologist, a human rights trainer, an ex-PBI (Peace Brigades International) worker, two people with field experience in Palestine, people with field experience in South and Central America, a senior advisor on Children in Conflict with Save the Children – Norway, a person who worked on tsunami response emergency work in Sri Lanka, two women working directly on empowerment projects in the slums of Kenya, two men who conduct non violence trainings in their organization, and two students of peace studies.

NP has now trained a further 19 civilian peacekeepers and, along with those trained over the last year in Nairobi and Quito but not yet deployed, they join the growing NP Reserve pool. This is timely, as the Sri Lanka project will be looking for 6 - 9 people by the end of this year, and the Philippines project is looking for one new member, and potentially more if financial support is found for an expansion.

As the new Capacity Building Director for NP, being at the assessment and the training (except for a 9-day period where I traveled to Brussels and London for meetings) has give me very valuable insights into how NP has been doing assessments and trainings up to date. I am coming away with many thoughts and ideas on ways to build on the work that so many NP staff and volunteers have already put into developing the Capacity Building of NP.