

EAY SECRETARY GENERAL'S REPORT

Bratislava, Saturday May 31, 2003

INSPIRED TO SERVE

1.

Oslo in December is not very romantic, I can promise you. If you want to be inspired to serve during those dark, cold December-days, you really have to look for sources of inspiration elsewhere than in the climate. (Some of us eat a lot to compensate.)

Early December last year a small group of people, international in composition, struggled through the streets of Oslo. They were fighting against snow and wind, but sticking together as if they were children from the Kindergarten, and eventually ended up in a small, but warm and cosy hotel downtown.

It was one of several meetings of the Steering Group for "YMCA Europe 2003", the big event in Prague. This time we met in Oslo, so that all of us could report to the National Board of the Norwegian Movement, responsible for the finances and host movement for the event.

Since it was Saturday night, the National Board invited us to join them for the Norwegian national dish, Pizza.

It was a wonderful evening and I think both the Board and the Steering Group felt immensely inspired. We presented big plans based on huge budgets. They presented generous trust and confidence. I was so impressed. Because mixed into this warm and nice atmosphere of Mozzarella-cheese and Pepperoni-sausages, this pizza of trust and dreams, was an underlying, deep going knowledge that we were now very close to the point of no return and that we were taking calculated risks. This was big and we had never done it before.

And we did not have many participants at that time.

We worked very hard through December and January, but sometimes felt more frightened to serve than inspired, I think.

Late January I was sitting in Prague together with Michal. Deadline for the so called "early bird-price - registration" was near. The moment of truth had eventually come, after more than two years of preparation.

I shall never forget those few days when the number of participants grew and grew until it became an explosion, strong enough to block the computer-

system. In a few days we had gone from scratch to 4569 participants from all over Europe and outside, even.

I have been inspired by mighty river falls, by the ocean in storm and the sunset in the mountains. Now I found that stronger than all of that was a new image: 4569 fingers pushing a button on their computers to tell us: Yes we want this! Can you imagine the infusion of energy and motivation and inspiration in those days?

I have called around to National Movements the last days, and I think it is fair to say that we have at least 6000 registered participants and we still hope for more.

Let me highlight a few examples of how YMCAs in Europe are preparing for the festival.

Jan will probably be mildly surprised when I start with Sweden. But I am so impressed with the profile of the festival in Sweden. In their magazine there has been mentioning of the festival in every single issue for a long time, of course they have a separate committee working for the festival, and now they have actually chartered a train to go to Prague with almost 500 participants on board. It is amazing. I understand that the whole National Council of Swedish YWCA/YMCA will travel together with the participants, living, eating, experiencing and talking together during a long journey to Prague. Imagine the result for the Swedish Movement, National and Regional leadership together with 500 participants in interaction and sharing for days and nights. Fellowship, mutual understanding, creation of plans for the future, I only hope that other Movements will do the same and use the festival as an opportunity to come closer to their own grassroots.

I know a local YMCA in the North of Norway organizing the whole adventure as a government supported training course. During the long bus ride to Prague and during the event in Prague, there will be opportunities enough for a good training schedule.

In the North of England there have been planes chartered for the participants, and I am impressed by the Regional Leaderships around England, how they actively support and facilitates for their young people to come to Prague. We will have more than 1000 participants from the four Nations in the UK.

When we started to prepare this festival, I counted with 3-400 participants from Eastern Europe. I thought we would have to give quite a lot of financial support to achieve even this relatively low number.

Today we have 304 young people only from Romania; we have the same from Russia, almost 200 from Ukraine, 220 from the Baltic states, and high numbers from all the other countries, including a boys' choir from Georgia and a charter plain for Armenia and Georgia together. More than 1200 participants from

these new YMCAs will make sure that we will have a real process of integration during that week in Prague, and the big majority of these participants come without any financial support from the outside. What an enthusiasm we experience from these countries!

We have an outstanding Steering Group leading the preparations, and under this group a number of committees preparing different fields of the festival. I receive minutes from meetings all around Europe and it is such a huge encouragement and inspiration to visualize all these committee meetings around Europe, engaging literary hundreds of YMCA leaders in the common preparation of this big event. This was always maybe the most important part of the vision - that people from all over Europe should work together for months and years and during that process and the result of it should experience a growing family feeling - real integration.

I know that some of you may have had problems to believe that we would really succeed with this huge vision. I do understand this skepticism very well and we have benefited from many of the critical questions we have got during the preparation process. It was really helpful and I only see it as a very positive intervention. It is the first time we do this and we have to learn a lot in a short period of time. My salute to those of you who also took the time to call me when you saw the amazing result during the last months, 6000 participants, to share with me your happiness that your skepticism was not confirmed. At least two different YMCA leaders have called me and shared with me that they see this festival having historic potential for our YMCA in Europe.

It was a real tough blow, however, when the Event manager resigned from his post a week ago. The Steering Group worked intensively to stabilize the situation, we had exactly 10 days to do that from the moment we got the information mentioned in my letter to you this Monday and till the resignation was a fact last Friday. During those 10 days we adjusted the program, the budgets and the management structure. As a result of that process we are back with balanced budgets, a strengthened Steering Group, a fantastic program and a new Event Manager to take over responsibility immediately.

No damage happened to the festival that we will not overcome. Therefore it is my pleasure to report to you that we are in control and ready to deliver a wonderful festival in August.

Instead of feeling low, this additional challenge has brought the Steering Group closer together and released energy and creativity and a renewed commitment to deliver the festival and give the YMCA in Europe a unique chance to experience integration and a new future together.

My first question to you, for debate afterwards, is exactly about the future. If this festival has a historic potential to change our YMCA in Europe, how do you see that will happen? What will be elements of inspiration for yourself? How do you intend to use the festival for your own National YMCA? Will there be a stronger international dimension to your YMCA as a result of the

festival? Will there be increased innovation in the program field of your YMCA? Will there be an increased focus on international solidarity and on the spiritual dimension of the YMCA? And what is your expectation to the EAY in the follow up after the festival? Do you think that we should do it again, and in that case, when or how often?

So much of our energy is going into this project, both on professional and on volunteer level. Is it worth it?

In my speech to the second part of the GA this year, on the Tuesday afternoon during the festival, I will go into some more detail on how the festival has implications for our strategy. But already now I can report to you that all four priorities in the strategy are being moved ahead by the festival, Integration, Solidarity, Networking and Sustainability and I think we are really covering the Mission Statement of EAY:

"We affirm that the Paris Basis, the Kampala Principles and Challenge 21 are the ongoing foundation statements of the mission of the YMCA.

Respecting and valuing the independence and diversity of all Member Movements, the EAY actively facilitates a process of integration of all National YMCAs into a European YMCA network of Movements which offers Christian community, exchange of ideas and mutual service among National Movements."

2.

Since this GA in Bratislava is just the first half of this year's assembly, I will not go into too many details. In the Working Documents you will find all the facts and figures of the work of EAY during the past year.

There have been highlights and wonderful moments. Let me touch on some of them.

1. 5 Field Groups and 12 partner Groups have organized Movement building activities in 14 countries. Last year was really bringing us into the new Balkan YMCAs like Fyrom Macedonia and Albania as a high priority area. We need to organize a Field Group for Albania. Who can help us? Think back to those years when we were used to regard Albania as the Lighthouse of Leninist/Marxism in Europe, actually a closed prison for the people of Albania. Now our Albanian friends are organizing their own YMCA. And here with us today is for the first time a representative of the Albanian YMCA, Olsi. Let us greet him! We need to help them - but it seems that we have spent a lot of the energy already. At the same time as other Balkan countries are cuing up to start YMCAs. As if that was not enough, we have received hopeful messages from Turkey and Kazakhstan.

This my second question to you for debate afterwards - Who are able to help us with leadership of the new Field Groups? Have we spent all the resources we had in the Movement Development field? Are there new countries we can challenge to take their part of the challenges?

2. The second Russian Program Festival last August again gave us an encouraging experience of the strength of the Russian YMCA and their neighbors. Next year it is Ukraine's time to organize their Program festival and the same will happen in the Baltic countries. And in Poland we will celebrate 80 years of Polish YMCA. We are looking forward to that!
3. 10 major Training events were organized by EAY during last year, including more than half of the National movements in Europe. This year we concluded a new round of Training The Trainers and opened the next one on Training for Program Developers. Maybe the highlight was "Catch the Vision 2" in Jerusalem, covering the theme "Spiritual Roots for Reconciliation" and offering an hours reception by Yasser Arafat in his head quarter in Ramallah for the whole group of participants.
4. The EAY Training Centre in Litomyšl is making real progress under leadership of the Committee Chair David Allen and the Centre Manager Jana Mackova. A steady growth in activities, ranging from receiving international groups to organizing activities for local students, is making the Centre more and more relevant. We signed a contract with the local authorities where we promised to come up with 15 million Czech Crowns as our contribution over the next 5 years to the renovation of the building. I was invited for a meeting in the Ministry of Education and was informed about a fantastically generous support from the Ministry to our activities in Czech Republic, both the Centre and the Festival. As a result of this support, we were granted 6 million CZK this year for the Centre, and with the 2 million from Danish Y'sMen we have already covered more than half of our share within the first months of the contract. We are hopeful for more support from the Czech Government next year.

At this point I find it very appropriate to express a deep-felt thank you to Jana Vohralikova for her unstopping assistance and hard work for both our big projects.

3.

To make the day-to-day operations of EAY happen, a lot of maintenance work has to be done with the network of partners supporting our work, as well as search for new partners. If you study the financial reports in the Working Documents, you will for example find that the so-called IMSS-funds of the World Alliance have disappeared totally, due to the general crisis on the World

Markets. There is no surplus on their investments these days. In a short period of time we went from SFR 112 500 to SFR 60 000 and then to nothing. This threatened to damage our operations in the Balkan area. We had saved quite a lot of IMSS-funds from previous years, which gave us a year to find compensation. Our friends in the YMCA of the USA granted us additional US 30 000 with perspectives for later years. Swiss YMCA/YWCA through Horyzon worked with Michal Szymanczak to write an application for additional support from the Swiss Youth Council. This hard work was successful and we got a grant for SFR 70 000 per year for 3 years for our Balkan Operations. Westpfälische Landeskirche through our friends in German YMCA is supporting us with DM 60 000 per year, and we are soon starting the work with a renewal of this grant for a next 3 years period.

Vardan Hambardzumyan has worked hard to negotiate with Dutch ICCO for a new 3-years grant for the Armenian YMCA and the EAY support for Caucasus.

Gerhard Gruhler and his friends in Germany are collecting money for the EAY and for many years they have been among the biggest contributors.

The Movement Development work in Central and Eastern Europe started back in 1991 supported by a grant from Agency for International Development from the USA, supported by YMCA of the USA. Together with our colleagues in Chicago we have now sent an application for support for 3 countries in Eastern Europe on the level of US 500 000 per year for 5 years.

The Global Operating Plan of the World Movement was presented and agreed upon during a wonderful World Council in Mexico last summer. EAY has participated in a very active role in the work with GOP, and we have presented a pilot project covering Russia, Ukraine and Belarus with a 3-year plan to organize a campaign against HIV-aids.

Georgia, Fyrom Macedonia and Albania will join the GOP next year.

I mention this work as an example of the day-to-day business of the EAY to keep the ship floating, and more than that, move the ship forward.

4.

I feel a deep need to say thank you and share the honor for these achievements with all our partners. Thank you to Jan Nissèn for his outstanding work for the EAY also during last year; it is an inspiration to work together with you and a fantastic EAY Executive Committee. Please all of you. Stand up and receive a good hand!

Thank you to the Deputy Secretary, Michal Szymanczak, a jewel of a person and carrying so much of the responsibility for the success of EAY. And thank you to the whole staff, please get up and receive a well deserved applaud!

Included in this thank you is also my very dear friend, Jerry Prado Shaw, and the YMCA of the USA. It is a pleasure to work with such a distinguished YMCA-leader and close friend as Jerry is, and his very professional team in Chicago. I salute you!

5.

Not a single year without the Blue Music! What is the deepest source of inspiration to serve? It is the knowledge that we are working in the context of the Kingdom of God.

Therefore I want to end this speech with the perspective of the Blue Music coming to us from our Lord God Almighty, because we are not unknown to Him. He knows about our Centre in Litomyšl and the festival with all its challenges. He knows about the new Hungarian Centre at the Balaton Sea and the new Russian Training Centre in Jaroslav and the YMCA building in Volochyn, Belarus and he is with interest following the preparations for the YMCA Conference in Kassel in October.

He knows us, and He knows you personally. That is why we can pray to Him and ask for strength and guidance and inspiration, inspiration to continue to serve. A few times during the past year I really felt that there was only one set of footsteps in the sand, as He was carrying us in his arms, You remember that poem?

And the small projects we are doing, they add up, piece by piece, and become building stones for the Kingdom of God. And while we are working and struggling and being afraid and inspired, smiling and laughing, the Blue Music is accompanying us, and it comes to us from places far away and lifts our souls and gives strength to our bodies and fills us with hope, hope for a never ending future.