

**Keynote speech made by Fatmire Feka, newly appointed member of The Eagle Down Foundation's Board of Directors, at the European meeting of the "Young Active Citizenships" forum in Helsinki, Finland, 03 July 2006 ([www.citizenships.fi](http://www.citizenships.fi)).**

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Greetings to all of you. My name is Fatmire Feka, I am a Kosovar Albanian and a Moslem from Kosovo. I am very pleased to have the chance to be here with you to tell you about my experiences in motivating and mobilizing young people in Kosovo for the cause of peace.

Given the fear and the pain that children in Kosovo have experienced, it may surprise you to hear that young people in my country have a strong desire for peace and they are committed to its reality.

Let me first share with you some of my personal experiences of life in Kosovo during and after the war.

When the war began it was very difficult for everyone, especially for the children of Kosovo. We saw many things that no child should see, and experienced things that no child should have to go through. Like every war, the war in Kosovo was very violent. It left thousands of people dead -

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old people, babies, mothers, pregnant women, brothers and sisters. I saw many people crying for friends and family they had lost, and many homes burned to the ground.

Since the end of the war in 1999, 3500 people are still missing. I am personally affected by this as my sister Sadet, who was 19 years old, and my brother Sami, who was 17 years old, disappeared during the war.

Seven years later my brother and sister are still missing. My family continues to suffer today as we wait for answers and are longing to learn about the fate of our loved ones. My heart is broken and I suffer daily for my brother and sister.

During the war, my family and I escaped with our tractor and very little else. We hid in the woods for a few months barely able to survive. Life was very difficult for us.

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I was eleven years old when the war ended and the NATO troops entered into Kosovo. When we returned to our burned out home I hated all Serbs for the bad things they had done. However, I quickly realized that hating them wasn't right. It wasn't good for our future. I thought to myself: "the violence that is destroying us must end, the pain needs to stop!"

Although these were my feelings, as a child I was unable to do anything. I then met a Canadian worker from World Vision who taught me all about peace, tolerance and living together. I am very grateful for his help.

With the support of World Vision I started a 'Kids for Peace' club in 2002. We soon grew to 8 clubs - 4 Albanian and 4 Serbian, from different places around Kosovo. Today there are now 14 clubs with about 360 children actively involved from all over Kosovo. In these clubs the children learn about how to make peace. They learn to solve problems, to be tolerant and to listen. They learn about their rights and also how to respect the

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rights of others. Through the 'Kids for Peace' clubs the members have been able to make many friends, regardless of their religion or ethnicity.

The children communicate to each other through letters and messages and by exchanging visits.

They quickly implemented a number of projects bringing Kosovar children from all ethnic groups together for a common cause. Projects included activities that would bring the communities together, both young and old, around common issues that affected everyone. For example:

- We held a "Cleaning the Environment of Kosovo Day" where we all got out to clean our communities of the rubbish left over from years of neglect;

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- Some of the older Serbian and Albanian youth in the ethnically-divided city of Mitrovica organized a visit to each other's religious sites to learn more about each other's faiths. The religious leaders and other adults who were escorting us were so impressed with our visits that some of them had to take pictures to recall the moment when Serbs and Albanians walked side-by-side in an effort to better understand each other;
  
- We worked together to support the handicapped children of Kosovo and to hold a very special day of activities for the children from a number of ethnic backgrounds who are less fortunate than many of us;
  
- Through the generous support of The Eagle Down Foundation, of which I am a Youth Ambassador, and World Vision Switzerland, Peace Camps were organized in Montenegro for Serbian, Albanian

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and Bosnian children from Bosnia, Kosovo and Albania. We just completed our second Peace Camp last week. We are now also starting to reach beyond the Balkans as we are starting to coordinate our work and share ideas with youth and children from Chechnya, Abkhazia, Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan,

We, the young people of Kosovo are determined to work for peace. We want our country to be a safe place; a peaceful place full of love and respect for others. It is hard to reach these goals because many people think differently than we do. Hate and bitterness are big barriers to peace. But if we really want to achieve peace, and if we really want the violence to stop, we must never give up.

IT IS EASY TO SAY YES TO PEACE BUT IT IS HARD TO WORK ON IT, I  
AM PROUD TO WORK FOR PEACE IN KOSOVO.

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There is no country in the world with only good or only bad people. We have to accept this and live with it. Respect for one another, despite religion or nationality, will help lead us to peace and freedom. Wherever there is peace there is also freedom.

The youth and children of Kosovo are committed to this multi-ethnic peace movement. We are determined to never give up.

Their right as children to participate actively in this effort, as outlined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, is the foundation of this children's peace movement. We, the children and youth of Kosovo are powerful peace builders and strong activists for change. We continue to have influence and a powerful impact over our friends, families, and communities. Please listen to us – learn from us – and support us in our efforts.

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Many peace activists who have worked in conflict zones will tell you that conflict is cyclical. The youth and children of today become the fighters and politicians of tomorrow. Youth and children must be supported to build peace through education, ongoing dialogue and active participation.

To ignore us in our potential, our efforts and our achievements is simply to ignore our fundamental rights. It is also to miss an opportunity for the possibility of lasting peace by breaking the traditional cyclical nature of conflict.

Dear friends, on behalf of the youth and children of Kosovo I would like to thank you for inviting me here this week to speak to you about our many challenges and aspirations. Through this forum you have shown us youth and children great respect. We make a pledge to you that we will never give up in our work.

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To conclude, our message to you from the youth and children of Kosovo is:

***"Our goals are to encourage respect for diversity and to build a better future for Kosovo. Let our ideas, our thoughts and our voices be heard."***

Thank you.