

REBUILDING THE HUMAN SPIRIT:

WHEN CULTURE SUPPORTS

HUMAN Security

Canadian artists are joining international stars on the bill of the first major cultural event in postwar Kosovo and neighbouring areas. Such well-known names as Mikhail Baryshnikov, Bono, Elton John, Sting and Meryl Streep are slated to perform on September 10 in Skopje, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and on September 11 and 12 in Pristina, Kosovo. Also featured in the event are Canadians: a miner's choral group from Nova Scotia, called Men of the Deep; and Tribe of One, a Winnipeg-based group of four musicians, two dancers and two visual artists who integrate rock music, dance and painting live on stage with an art therapy approach.

Called "The Return," the International Festival of Music and Theatre is being held under the auspices of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and UNICEF. Its aim is to support the rebuilding of Kosovo's cultural and educational community. Spearheaded by British actor Vanessa Redgrave, the Festival has received strong backing from the Government of Canada.

The story began in June, shortly after the end of the conflict in Kosovo. Then filming in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Vanessa Redgrave approached Foreign Affairs Minister Axworthy and sought Canada's support for the project. "Because of the major role it played in the worldwide campaign to ban landmines," she says, "Canada's human security agenda is well known on the international scene and is a natural fit for the humanitarian effort we are undertaking in Kosovo." She adds, "The reaction was instant and positive, and will go a long way in helping us reach our goal of aiding Albanian Kosovar children and young people recover their cultural spirits with the confidence that they have a future."

The Minister agreed to Ms. Redgrave's request and announced a contribution of \$200 000 to the event. The money comes from the Department's Children in Armed Conflict Program, which conducts music and art therapy throughout Kosovo, and from the International Cultural Relations Program. "The rebuilding effort must not only focus on bricks and mortar; we must also help rebuild the human spirit," says Mr. Axworthy. Noting that Canada was the first country to get behind the initiative, he adds that it is important for Canadian artists to play a major role on the international scene and actively help the Kosovars survive as artists and families.

This contribution is only a small part of the Children in Armed Conflict Program. Activities are currently under way in countries such as Albania, Bosnia, South Africa, Peru and Rwanda, as well as in Kosovo. Projects include organizing psycho-social therapy workshops for Kosovo refugee children and children affected by political violence in Peru, producing documentary films on the fate of children not only as innocent victims but as targets, and developing educational tools to help war-affected youth move toward "peace" and learn techniques for conflict resolution. ●



VANESSA REDGRAVE

photo: CANAPRESS

To learn more about the Children in Armed Conflict Program, visit the Department's Web site (www.dfait-maeci.gc.ca/culture/children/menu-e.htm) or call (613) 996-3649.



photo: Wendy McAlpine

Winnipeg-based group Tribe of One