



# Ålands fredsinstitut

## The Åland Islands Peace Institute

*NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations*

## **Planning of the Youth exchange Boundaries II – international meeting on Åland in April 2010**



**Learning about other cultures that may be in some ways different from our own will help us gain respect and understanding of the cultural differences that make people unique. This is the impression of the youth and youth leaders which participated in an advance planning visit (APV) in preparation of the Boundaries II youth camp that will be held in the Åland Islands in August 2010.**

Linda Heinola from the Åland islands, who participated in the youth exchange Boundaries I in Ysselsteyn, the Netherlands last summer, and will also take part in Boundaries II on Åland, thinks that the Boundaries youth exchange is a great activity that teach young people team work and respect for different cultures.

Linda was among the six young people from Åland that traveled in July 2009 to a week long peace camp in Ysselsteyn, the Netherlands. At the camp they discussed personal, cultural and national borders and boundaries with participants from the Netherlands, Bulgaria, Turkey and Hungary. The Ålandic participants were sent to the camp by the Åland Islands Peace Institute, and the trip and the camp were financed by the EU Youth in Action programme.

Now Boundaries II invites young people to share their ideas about how to understand and respect different cultures, to question prejudices and to gain understanding of being individual, not only part of a national or cultural group. The young people will also acquire tools for managing conflicts in personal life, especially conflict related to cultural differences. This years' youth camp will engage 30 young people from Åland, Bulgaria, Greece, the Netherlands, and Turkey in the Åland Islands. Through Boundaries II the participants will learn how to deal with conflicts in an intercultural context and to create an atmosphere of common understanding between young people representing different cultures, working styles and habits.



All activities in the camp will also encourage young people to take initiatives and to be responsible. The participants of the exchange will prepare and implement many workshops and activities themselves. In the evenings each national group will introduce their own culture through arranging a cultural night for the others. Another activity that will give the participants an opportunity to practice their teamworking skills is creating a newspaper with the vantage point of the themes of “boundaries” and identity”. While working in mixed small groups with writing and editing articles for the newspaper they will get to know each other more closely and practice their English language skills. “The Boundaries youth camp is an opportunity for all participants to get to know each other through working together” youth workers that were participating in the APV pointed out.

In order to discuss activities and rules in advance and to get acquainted with the islands one participant and one youth leader from each partner organization travelled to Åland Islands to participate in an APV. The advance planning visit was held on May 6, 2010, in the island of Prästö which is connected to mainland Åland by a bridge and where the camp participants will stay during the exchange. The APV was organized by the host organization the Åland Islands Peace Institute. All youth leaders shared the opinion that it is always useful to meet beforehand and to discuss responsibilities and activities in advance in order to make sure that everything is clear.



It was decided that the young participants themselves would be responsible for organizing the work shops. This will be done electronically, since the working groups would be of an international character. It was thought that this arrangement would give participants an opportunity to get close to each other already before the exchange.

Speaking about the expectation from the camp the youth leaders noted that Boundaries II as the continuation of a first exchange will help participants to know how borders and boundaries can be peacefully managed, to meet other people from different countries and to communicate with them and to learn more about these countries and people. Because they think that “all experience of communication is a sort of learning”. Youth workers also pointed out that this camp is also a great way to get an opportunity to practice a different language and to understand non-verbal communication. In the first camp some participants communicated through non-verbal communication which helped them to get to know persons with lesser English language skills.

After Boundaries II a third exchange project is planned to be held in the Balkans in 2011. This exchange will draw attention to more recent European conflicts. Through discussions participants will share ideas on how conflicts can be managed so that people can live in peace in the future.

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May 2010