

NOTICEboard

Women of Cyprus – Youth of Cyprus gather in old Nicosia

LAST month, more than 40 young Cypriots gathered at the premises of the Nicosia Municipality Multifunctional Centre, in old Nicosia. These young people were members of the Greek Cypriot organisation Soma Akriton and the Turkish Cypriot organisation HASDER. The event was organised by Soma Akriton and the aim of the gathering was to discuss the different perspectives of the two communities after the screening of a stimulating documentary called *Women of Cyprus* by Vasiliki Katrivanou and Bushra Azzouz.

Born in Athens, Greece, Vasiliki Katrivanou works internationally (mainly in Greece, US, Mexico, Palestine and Israel) as a therapist, educator and conflict resolution facilitator. Most recently, her work has been focused on women's empowerment. She is also interested in filmmaking as a medium for social change. *Women of Cyprus* is her first documentary.

The afternoon meeting began with the show of the documentary 'Women of Cyprus'. In the spring of 2004, Maria, a Greek Cypriot and Zehra, a Turkish Cypriot, cross to opposite sides of the green line dividing Cyprus since the events of 1974 to visit the family homes they had not seen for thirty years. Thus begins the personal journey of these women as the film follows them through their pasts, haunted by conflict and pain, to their present search for reconciliation and common ground. On the eve of the UN referendum to reunite the divided island, many buried stories from the past surface. Rare archival footage adds context to the Cypriot conflict. The filmmaker brings together women from both sides of the island who share their fears, distrust and hopes. For

some, this includes years of experience working together to bridge the divide between their communities. Candid interviews and revealing group discussions trace the women's inspiring capacity for contact that transcends ethnic differences. As the referendum approaches, they must confront how to appease their hesitations, define safety and trust and learn to live with each other again. With heartbreaking honesty, insight and humour, the women define their concepts of home, community and relation to the land. For four years, the filmmaker returned to Cyprus to collaborate with the women in the film, to process the conflict with them and witness their determination to love together again. The film is emblematic of other regions of the world where populations suffer years of conflict and division and the need for peace remains urgent.

The documentary really moved the young Cypriots, and in a following discussion they accepted it as very balanced, between the different perspectives of the two communities. The documentary sent the message of mutual understanding, but also the acceptance of disagreement. After the discussion, a workshop followed and the young Cypriots in small, mixed groups had the chance to get to know each other, to work together and to share feeling and emotions. For a lot of them, this was the first time that they taken part in a bi-communal activity. And it was a great experience. The youth proved once again that they had can work together for a peaceful future.

The event was inspired by the 'World Peace Day' on September 21 and was held within the framework of the bi-communal Youth Activism Project, which received funding from the United Nations Development Programme-Action for Cooperation and Trust.