

Press Release for Youth Bridge Global's Production of *As You Like It* in Bosnia and Herzegovina (July 31 - August 12)

### PLAYING ACROSS ETHNIC LINES: *As You Like It* in Bosnia and Herzegovina

In Mostar, a city still divided by deep-seated ethnic nationalism, Youth Bridge Global's ([ybglobal.org](http://ybglobal.org)) production of Shakespeare's great romantic comedy, *As You Like It*, aims to bring friendship and understanding to young people from all corners of the city. The cast includes 15 - 25 year olds from Herzegovina's main ethnic backgrounds: Bosniaks (Muslims) and Croats (Catholics), as well as several mixed Serb-Croat participants. Only 17 years ago, these populations were embroiled in Europe's bloodiest conflict since the Second World War. By presenting this rare opportunity for inter-ethnic work in the region, Youth Bridge Global hopes to "make ethnicity redundant" through a theatrical process which, "demands selflessness, preparation, and trust," according to the organization's founder and director of this year's play, Andrew Garrod, Professor Emeritus of Education at Dartmouth College and author of several works on adolescent development in cross-cultural context and in conditions of war. Opening on July 31, the production will run for two weeks, and will show in several cities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as cities internationally in Montenegro and Croatia.

Since the highly relevant production of *Romeo and Juliet* in 2006, which starred a Muslim Romeo and a Catholic Juliet, Youth Bridge Global has been using Shakespeare as a tool to bring about reconciliation in this region. Acting Shakespeare convincingly requires a rigorous reading of the text, as well as a commitment to voicing personal life experience through the role - a commitment which allows the actors to step outside of their comfort zones and engage each other in meaningful ways. After last year's successful production of *The Tempest* - an exploration of the nature of vengeance and forgiveness, a subject which relates directly to the Bosnian context - we turned towards *As You Like It* for a more light-hearted play - an exploration of different kinds of love. Youth Bridge Global seeks to provide educationally enriching experiences and opportunities for artistic expression in areas of the world that are under-resourced or face peculiar challenges. The international team features Assistant Directors and staff from the United States and Canada, a stage combat specialist from Great Britain, as well as a local Mostarian Producer, Composer, Costume Designer and Choreographers. An American Theater Professor from Dartmouth College (and dedicated Linklater Voice Teacher), James Rice, leads voice and breathing workshops designed to help the cast master Shakespeare's language, 80 percent of which is performed in the local languages, and several of the Assistant Directors lead improvisations and games to improve the rudiments of acting Shakespeare.

With last week's burial of 520 recently identified victims of the 1995 Srebrenica Massacre - the worst single genocide in Europe since the Holocaust - and two Bosnian Serb leaders (General Ratko Mladić and Political Leader Radovan Karadžić) currently on trial in The Hague, charged with crimes against humanity and genocide, memories of the war remain fresh. In Mostar, a city which once had the highest rates of inter-ethnic marriage in the Balkans, public education is now segregated along ethnic lines, and political parties are defined by their national identity. For some of the students in the cast, this is the first opportunity to work extensively across ethnic lines. The tour will visit several cities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, including Sarajevo, Srebrenica and Banja Luka, the capital of the Republika Srpska region of BiH, as well as other cities in the former Yugoslavia. With the upcoming tour, Youth Bridge Global aims not only to educate the cast members - bringing them to important war memorials and cultural heritage sites - but also to showcase the extensive talents of Mostar youth.