

Lincoln man to bring reform to Bosnian prison system

EASTERN EUROPE will benefit from the experience of a Nebraska businessman.

By JOSH FUNK
Staff Reporter

A Lincoln man is on his way to prison . . . in Bosnia. Gary Hill, president of Lincoln's CEGA Services, will head to Eastern Europe in October to begin helping Bosnians reform their prison system.

Hill's mission will be a part of the United Nations' offer to help reform the Bosnian criminal justice system. Two other American representatives traveling with Hill will focus on Bosnia's police force and courts.

Since the 1970s, Hill has been training prison staffs in developing countries around the world. Hill shows them how to follow humanitarian and legal standards while working with the resources available in the country.

"A prison can be run anywhere with good staff and management, so our program concentrates on training the staff," Hill said.

Andrew Wedeman, assistant political science professor, explained Bosnia's division and civil war. He said the region's Serbs, Croats and Muslims were split by differences in their race and religions. When fighting between Serbia and Croatia began in 1991, Bosnia was caught in

the middle.

"Maybe I've just read 'Humpty Dumpty' too many times because I'm not sure it's a good idea to put it back together again once it has fallen apart," Wedeman said. "They should just split Bosnia up between Serbia and Croatia and be done with it."

But for now, Bosnia is its own country and is just beginning to rebuild everything destroyed in the war. And that's where Hill comes in.

Before Hill visits a country, he researches its laws, procedures and background.

"I talk to people who have lived in the country or been there recently to help get an understanding of the culture," Hill said.

On his first trip, Hill becomes acquainted with the people and the culture to learn about where the prisoners come from — and it's not the Embassy Suites.

"I never stay in anything better than a one half of one star hotel, so I can see what life is really like," Hill said.

When he returns, Hill writes a training manual. Each country's manual is tailored to fit its laws, culture and resources.

The basis for Hill's training manual was created by consulting with prison training programs around the world to find a core curriculum of 36 lessons common to all the programs. Then the manual was tested in various places and adapted to fit the circumstances.

Once the draft is complete, Hill returns it to the country and consults with prison officials to customize the program.



RYAN SODERLIV/DN

GARY HILL points to a map of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Hill will travel there in October to help reform the Bosnian prison system.

When the manual is ready for use, Hill personally trains the prison officials who will later train the prison staff.

"In many developing countries the prison guards are illiterate, so we had to develop different teaching methods," Hill said.

In some countries, Hill said, guards have little or no knowledge of weapons because the government cannot afford to buy ammunition for training exercises.

The change is not immediate, and some reforms take years, but Hill stays in contact with officials and helps make lasting changes.

"I stay in contact through mail, e-mail and phone calls. We provide them with any new information and help address any problems they are having," Hill said.

A better prison system leads to better citizen morale, Hill said. When people view prisons as an implement of repression, they distrust the police and the system.

"To judge how good a society is, look at its prisons," Hill said. "See how they treat the worst of their society and know that the rest can't be much better off."



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