

Regional Consultation with Civil Society Organizations on the Initiative for RECOM

Skopje, FYR of Macedonia
July 3, 2010

A regional consultation with civil society organizations on the Initiative for RECOM (Regional Commission Tasked with Establishing and Publicly Declaring the Facts about War Crimes and other Serious Human Rights Violations in the former Yugoslavia) was organized by the Humanitarian Law Center - Kosovo in Skopje on July 3, 2010. The consultation was attended by 56 participants, mostly from Macedonia, and was moderated by Veton Suroi (Syri i Vizionit, Kosovo). TV Kanal 5, EURM, Kanal 77, A1 TV, Alsat TV, TELMA TV, and Alb TV all reported on the consultation.

Suggestions and Opinions of Participants:

One of the main issues the regional commission should be focused on is to provide satisfaction for the families of the missing. Sub-committees should be formed in each RECOM member state.

I think that one of the main issues the commission should focus on is the satisfaction of missing persons' family members. In Macedonia we are still dealing with a number of citizens listed as missing, and, if you haven't planned to do so, I think that for this reason it would be a good idea to form sub-committees in all of the member states of the regional commission. (Raim Limani, Skopje, Macedonia, Association of War Veterans of the National Liberation Army, Regional Consultation with Civil Society Organizations on the Initiative for RECOM, Skopje, FYR Macedonia, July 3, 2010).

If this initiative is successful, it can inspire many other conflict areas around the world to do something similar.

(...) it is common knowledge that nothing very trendy and popular ever comes from the Balkans... This initiative, not only that it is so morally important and that it is the only possible factual, historical, and legal opportunity to help victims, is also something very modern, and if it turns out to be successful, it can inspire many other conflict areas around the world to do something similar. (Lazar Stojanović, Humanitarian Law Center, Belgrade, Serbia, Regional Consultation with Civil Society Organizations on the Initiative for RECOM, Skopje, FYR Macedonia, July 3, 2010).

Establishing the facts narrows the space for manipulation, lies, and exaggeration or minimization of the number of victims.

Establishing the facts is important for making the already established lies lose their credibility, and for helping societies reach a shared understanding on what happened in those conflict years. That will also help narrow the space for manipulation, exaggeration, or minimization of the number of victims of specific war crimes. (Marko Veličković, Center for the Development of Civil Resources, Belgrade, Serbia, Regional Consultation with Civil Society Organizations on the Initiative for RECOM, Skopje, FYR Macedonia, July 3, 2010).

Family members of war veterans are also victims because of the trauma they suffered.

War veterans are victims, but so are our families. They belong to a category of invisible victims who have been seriously traumatized. Each family member of each war veteran is traumatized. (Nikola Grkov, Association of Army Veterans, Kavadarci, Macedonia, Regional Consultation with Civil Society Organizations on the Initiative for RECOM, Skopje, FYR Macedonia, July 3, 2010).

We must advocate for the creation of a regional commission dealing with establishing the number of persons suffering from post-traumatic stress syndrome, who committed suicide, or who were killed by individuals suffering from post-traumatic stress syndrome.

I have written a lot about post-traumatic stress, known also as Vietnam Syndrome (...) I think we must advocate for the creation of a regional commission dealing with establishing the number of persons suffering from this post-traumatic stress syndrome, who committed suicide, or who were killed by individuals suffering from post-traumatic stress syndrome. (Nikola Grkov, Association of Army Veterans, Kavadarci, Macedonia, Regional Consultation with Civil Society Organizations on the Initiative for RECOM, Skopje, FYR Macedonia, July 3, 2010).

Macedonian people have their truth about the events of 2001 and Albanians have theirs.

Macedonians have their truth about the events from 2001 and Albanians have theirs, which is burdened by prejudices and marked by stereotypes. They really discuss this topic. All discussion concerning the events of 2001, all attempts to overcome the consequences, to determine what kind of treatment the victims should be given – we have put all that into the hands of politicians and to political will, the governments and coalition partners. They need to agree on how to adopt a law on homeland defenders, and they need to decide if a law on members of the Kosovo Liberation Army is going to be adopted. (Frusina Remenski, Faculty of National Security, Skopje, Macedonia, Regional Consultation with Civil Society Organizations on the Initiative for RECOM, Skopje, FYR Macedonia, July 3, 2010).

Macedonia needs the Initiative for RECOM.

There is no doubt that the FYR of Macedonia needs an initiative like this, although the number of war crimes victims is disproportionate to the number of victims in other former Yugoslav republics. I think that we need an initiative like this to help us find the answers to some of the burning questions in Macedonia, to help overcome prejudices and ethnic barriers, and to help the two communities open up to each other. (Frusina Remenski, Faculty of National Security, Skopje, Macedonia, Regional Consultation with Civil Society Organizations on the Initiative for RECOM, Skopje, FYR Macedonia, July 3, 2010).

I am very optimistic about this process. I had an opportunity to meet with representatives of RECOM several times (...) for me, RECOM is very important (...) the regional approach promoted by RECOM can help us a great deal if we have an initiative that will deal with the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, armed conflicts of that magnitude. (Boro Kitanoski, Peace Action, Prilep, Macedonia, Regional Consultation with Civil Society Organizations on the Initiative for RECOM, Skopje, FYR Macedonia, July 3, 2010).

As much as it is really necessary, RECOM is also a way for the governments in the region to avoid accepting responsibility.

(...) there are many reasons why we should form this commission which will be active across the entire region of the former Yugoslavia. However, on the other hand, I am afraid that this commission will take the responsibility which should have been taken by the states, or by a state commission. How can we create RECOM, which is truly indispensable, without the involvement of the governments in the region, which will understand it as an opportunity to avoid accepting responsibility? (Thomas Kohls, Peace Action, Prilep, Macedonia, Regional Consultation with Civil Society Organizations on the Initiative for RECOM, Skopje, FYR Macedonia, July 3, 2010).

In order to make sure the governments in the region follow and implement RECOM's suggestions, this commission must be an official body.

(...) we are talking here all the time about forming a commission which will have four main characteristics, one of which is that the commission is an official body (...) so that at the end of its mandate this regional commission can compile its final report and it will contain all of the established facts, as well as recommendations addressed to the governments who founded it (...) in terms of reparations, memorials, and so on, which at the same time makes the report the most credible source of information that can be used by educational institutions (...) But, at the same time, if we want the governments to have a real obligation with respect to those recommendations, they should be involved in the process. I think that the work of an unofficial commission would not put the governments in a position to fully cooperate with and implement the recommendations. (Marko Veličković, Center for the Development of Civil Resources, Belgrade, Serbia, Regional Consultation with Civil Society Organizations on the Initiative for RECOM, Skopje, FYR Macedonia, July 3, 2010).

We believe that reconciliation between Macedonians and Albanians is possible.

We believe that reconciliation between Macedonians and the Albanians is possible, and I think that this kind of activity can help overcome divisions and will make conclusions about what happened in 2001 so that future generations can learn from that. (Aco Jovanoski, Association of the Defenders of Macedonia, Skopje, Regional Consultation with Civil Society Organizations on the Initiative for RECOM, Skopje, FYR Macedonia, July 3, 2010).

Members of our current government are the same people who caused the conflict. They are hiding the truth about war crimes. RECOM must grow strong so that it can stand up to them, and the only way to do that is to attract as many people as possible in the Initiative for RECOM.

(...) over 50% of politicians on the territory of the former Yugoslavia are the same people who caused the conflict, and they are still in power. I am sure they are doing their best to cover up the truth about the war crimes. If RECOM does not grow very strong, it will not have the necessary mechanisms or the tools to stand up to that. The only tool RECOM can have is as many members as possible supporting this initiative. (Besim Hoda, Civic Movement EC, Gostivar, Macedonia, Regional Consultation with Civil Society Organizations on the Initiative for RECOM, Skopje, FYR Macedonia, July 3, 2010).

The European Union can force governments to find the missing.

(...) we need the strong support of the European Union, especially in terms of forcing the governments of all post-Yugoslav states to find the missing. (Armend Mazreku, Speak Up Movement, Priština/Prishtinë, Kosovo, Regional Consultation with Civil Society Organizations on the Initiative for RECOM, Skopje, FYR Macedonia, July 3, 2010).

The Initiative for RECOM is a noble idea.

(...) now I understand what it is that you want to achieve with this initiative and yes, I agree with this noble idea. (Oliver Bacanović, Faculty of National Security, Skopje, Macedonia, Regional Consultation with Civil Society Organizations on the Initiative for RECOM, Skopje, FYR Macedonia, July 3, 2010).

We need to initiate a change in the legal sanction system and make it compatible with RECOM.

(...) we need to look at it in terms of necessary changes that will happen in the implementation process. We need new laws, and in the area of criminal responsibility the old laws need to be changed so that the legal sanction system is changed (...) if it is established that somebody committed a criminal act his responsibility is individualized, and we need to identify the best way to delegate this responsibility towards judicial institutions, prosecutors' offices, police, and so on. (Milena Savić, CIPP, Zvornik, BiH, Regional Consultation with Civil Society Organizations on the Initiative for RECOM, Skopje, FYR Macedonia, July 3, 2010).

RECOM must use its recommendations to influence a change in the education system. Public hearings will lead to a collective empathy.

(...) the commission's responsibility is huge because it has to use its high quality, detailed recommendations to influence, first of all, a positive change in the area of education – the official education system which will be responsible for teaching future generations the difference between right and wrong. I think that public hearings of the commission will result in a collective empathy. (Ivan Novosel, Legalis, Zagreb, Croatia, Regional Consultation with Civil Society Organizations on the Initiative for RECOM, Skopje, FYR Macedonia, July 3, 2010).