

Consultation with the local community on the RECOM Initiative

Bratunac, Bosnia and Herzegovina

November 27, 2010

The Consultation with the local community in Bratunac was organized by the Information and Legal Support Center (CIPP), a member of the Coalition for RECOM. The gathering was attended by 35 participants – victims, members of non-governmental organizations, members of a range of associations, journalists, and experts who work with victims. Introductory speeches were given by Milena Savić, CIPP, Zvornik, BiH and Amir Kulagić, BiH, member of the Coordination Council of the Coalition for RECOM.

Opinions, Suggestions, and Recommendations of the Participants

There will not be enough living witnesses to testify about all of the victims. RECOM should make sure that a moral and human standard is upheld in convicting perpetrators even after the death of the witnesses.

I believe that this Initiative should be supported and I think that the more it is postponed the worse the impact will be on the overall result of the efforts to sentence as many war crimes perpetrators as possible. There will not be enough living witnesses to testify about all of the victims and most family members will not live to see the justice done in the cases where their family members were victims of war crimes. RECOM and all those associations, different organizations and the like should continue working in this direction to at least satisfy moral or human standards. Victims should be compensated in a way that will ensure the punishment of war crimes perpetrators even after the death of the victims. Let's take the example of the war crimes trial conducted in Belgrade for approximately 1,500 victims from the area of the Zvornik municipality. The main defendant was sentenced to five years in prison, which is a pitiful example of the exercise of justice. All those courts trying war crimes are incompetent and I believe that RECOM's activity will help improve them. For that reason, as president of the Association of Returning Residents of the Zvornik Municipality I will do my best to support this initiative and I will consider it moral support to the victims. (Omer Selimović, Association of

Returning Residents of the Zvornik Municipality, Zvornik, BiH. Consultation with the local community on the RECOM Initiative, November 27, 2010, Bratunac, Bosnia and Herzegovina).

Children are the true victims of the war. One of the suggestions for RECOM is to replace monotheist religious courses in schools with courses teaching comparative religion so that the children can understand other religions.

There are 276 children with disabilities in our Leptir Association in Srebrenica from the municipalities of Srebrenica, Bratunac, Vlasenica, and Šehovići. Out of this number, 30% of those disabilities were directly caused by the armed conflict. And it is safe to say that children are the true victims of the war. We all talk about children's rights. Many non-governmental organizations receive financial aid to support children's rights while in reality we witness the abuse of children's basic rights on a daily basis. And I think that in addition to the children born during the war, the children born after the war should also be considered victims. Our association will support RECOM, but it is our duty to support the truth... Also, I would like to make a recommendation for RECOM to advocate for the replacement of monotheist religious courses in schools with comparative religion so that each child can understand and appreciate other religions. Religious communities should (continue to) do whatever it is that they do [outside of schools]...I hope that the five members of the commission from BiH will be properly educated to be able to take statements [from victims and witnesses to war crimes] in an appropriate manner. My message here is also that we should see to it that persons we interview as victims do not remain victims after the hearing... they should not be left alone. When victims show up for a public hearing, when they are ready to talk about their suffering, we know they want to do it, but we also know that it is not going to be easy for them or their families and they are going to suffer for days... (Željka Katanić, Leptir Association of the Families of Children and Youth with Disabilities, Srebrenica, BiH. Consultation with the local community on the RECOM Initiative, November 27, 2010, Bratunac, Bosnia and Herzegovina).

Let's come closer together, let's love each other, and let's not dig too deep. It is not good to investigate too much and put too much energy into it.

I'd like for us to work and get closer together... Let's love each other and let's not dig too deep into the past because that can hurt us too... Don't think that I don't empathize with those who

lost their loved ones. I can understand them quite well, but I think that as a society we should not put too much energy into investigating what happened in the very distant past. I am professionally involved in bringing people closer together and helping them reconcile... I work at a psychological and marriage-counselling center... Also, if we listed the countries formed on the territory of the former Yugoslavia, we can't list Macedonia as a province ... Undoubtedly, that's a mistake. It should have been left the way it was written previously: without Kosovo, or 'Kosovo and the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina'. On the form in front of me, I solved that problem by adding 'Autonomous Province of Vojvodina' in front of Kosovo. (Dr. Cvijan Đapanović, EGO Association, Zvornik, BiH. Consultation with the local community on the RECOM Initiative, November 27, 2010, Bratunac, Bosnia and Herzegovina).

It is always the same group of organizations that keeps boycotting such gatherings. Representatives of the local community can't be excused for not showing up today.

We are going to understand each other somehow (non-governmental organizations, mothers, sisters, brothers), but I think that our local communities will not understand us. And the very fact that they are not here today clearly tells us that they neither support us or RECOM... I think it is about time (if we want to join RECOM and if RECOM is supported by the town of Bratunac, the local community and the non-governmental sector) that we are able to tell such stories and not feel uncomfortable about it. Regardless of which side the stories are coming from... Also, it is interesting that it is always the same group of non-governmental organizations that keeps boycotting such gatherings, or they start a story and then they leave the meeting. What I want to say is that for me the representatives of the local community and all those associations cannot be excused for not being here today. The fact is that if I am the only representative of my association here, then it should not be considered an association. My specific suggestion is that, when it comes to Bosnia and Herzegovina, we take January 1, 1990 as the date marking the beginning of the period that needs to be investigated. The first multi-party election was held in 1990 and we got a multi-party system. I think that as early as 1990 some individual killings took place in Bosnia and Herzegovina. (Hiba Ramić, Mezarje Foundation, Bratunac '92, Bratunac, BiH. Consultation with the local community on the RECOM Initiative, November 27, 2010, Bratunac, Bosnia and Herzegovina).

Kosovo was not a republic in the former Yugoslavia. Why do we want to give one million signatures for something that was not recognized by our state – Bosnia and Herzegovina and Republika Srpska?

I believe that it was an unintentional mistake - in the second last paragraph of RECOM's Admission Document, there is a list of former Yugoslav republics and Kosovo appears as one of them. I want us to understand each other here. Kosovo was not a republic in the former Yugoslavia. Why do we want to give one million signatures for something that was not recognized by our state – Bosnia and Herzegovina and Republika Srpska? I want the organizers of this meeting to pay attention to this and change this paragraph as I am sure they can do it. You said that this document needs to be ratified and I definitely want to see it ratified, but it will not be ratified in Serbia unless it is changed. I just don't want the whole thing returned to us for such an obvious reason. (Spasoje Mladenović, journalist, Večernje Novosti, Bratunac, BiH. Consultation with the local community on the RECOM Initiative. November 27, 2010, Bratunac, Bosnia and Herzegovina).