

*should be included because it is the time in their life when they form opinions on all important issues around them.*

**Statement:** Naim Leo Beširi, Youth Group of the Croatian Helsinki Committee for Human Rights, Regional consultation with young people, Belgrade, Serbia, October 21st 2007.

**It is beneficial to name all the places where crimes have been committed in the past: by becoming destinations for school field trips and excursions, young people can deal with the past interactively.**

*Our first step in dealing with the past is naming all war crimes locations because victims still feel threatened when nobody talks about them. That would grant some kind of satisfaction to all victims in the region and it would also serve to better inform the young people.*

**Statement:** Jelena Bubanja, Helsinki Committee for Human Rights Youth Organization, Serbia, Regional consultation with young people, Belgrade, Serbia, October 21st 2007.

**An award for prominent public figures influential in dealing with the past should be instituted.**

*There are many young people in our region who are idols to younger generations, artists, musicians, actors and film makers, and who truly deserve some kind of award for being active in promoting the dealing with the past concept. This initiative should probably institute one such award in each state and award it annually. That could be quite motivating.*

**Statement:** Iva Prpić, SDP Youth Forum, Croatia, Regional consultation with young people, Belgrade, Serbia, October 21st 2007.

## **10. Regional consultation with human rights organizations on instruments to establish and disclose the facts about war crimes**

Belgrade, Serbia,  
October 29th 2007

The consultation was organized by the Humanitarian Law Center (Serbia), Documenta (Croatia), and the Research and Documentation Center (BiH). It was opened by Nataša Kandić (Humanitarian Law Center, Serbia), Vesna Teršelić (Documenta, Croatia), and Mirsad Tokača (Research and Documentation Center, BiH) and was attended by

36 representatives of human rights organizations from the entire region. The discussion was moderated by Sandra Orlović (Humanitarian Law Center, Serbia). The media that covered the consultation were as follows: Danas, Beta, Pcnen.com, Infobiro.tv, Radio Free Europe, Crnps.org.rs and H-Alter.

**Human rights organizations should advocate the establishment of an official regional body tasked with establishing and disclosing the facts about war crimes.**

*I support the creation of this commission but it is going to be rather difficult because the government, the society, and the political elites haven't made up their mind yet about the past.*

**Statement:** Biljana Kovačević-Vučo, Lawyers' Committee for Human Rights, Serbia, Regional consultation with human rights organizations, Belgrade, Serbia, October 29th 2007.

*We need to have a regional cooperation because the issue at hand is a regional issue. We can exert pressure in many different ways to make national judicial systems functional enough to start conducting war crimes trials. But, we can also put pressure and lobby both at home and elsewhere to create this regional body for establishing the truth.*

**Statement:** Slobodan Franović, Montenegro Helsinki Committee for Human Rights, Montenegro, Regional consultation with human rights organizations, Belgrade, Serbia, October 29th 2007.

*This kind of commission or a body, we can call it different names, is an imperative of the moment. So, we all talked about experiences of various national commissions and how they were all a complete failure, and I'm sure that's true. That's what makes this commission really necessary (...) If we adopt a regional approach, it gives us more credibility.*

**Statement:** Aida Čorović, Urban In, Serbia, Regional consultation with human rights organizations, Belgrade, Serbia, October 29th 2007.

*Reconciliation may be debatable, but the truth commission should definitely be formed (...) Once the regional body is created, our goal is to promote it and make sure the body and the results of its work are well accepted throughout the region.*

**Statement:** Jezdimir Milošević, Humanists' Peace Action, BiH, Regional consultation with human rights organizations, Belgrade, Serbia, October 29th 2007.

*We should support the creation of a regional mechanism for establishing the facts about war crimes committed on the territory of the former Yugoslavia (...) I think that advocating such a body should also*

*be a task for human rights organizations and it should be an organized approach.*

**Statement:** Miroslav Živanović, Human Rights Center at the University of Sarajevo, BiH, Regional consultation with human rights organizations, Belgrade, Serbia, October 29th 2007.

**The regional body should focus on victims and facts but it should not establish responsibility for war crimes.**

*As a human rights organization we have to create a public space for victims because that should be our mandate, our platform (...) to make sure the commission is a space where victims can tell their stories.*

**Statement:** Andrej Nosov, Youth Initiative for Human Rights, Serbia, Regional consultation with human rights organizations, Belgrade, Serbia, October 29th 2007.

*First, we need to determine the exact duration of periods for which facts are to be established. Whether it is 1992-1995 or 1991-1995, or whether it is 1999-2000 when speaking about Kosovo. Secondly, we need to agree on the kind of facts to be established, and thirdly, what to specify the time frame for this body. It cannot be five years or three years because people expect some results sooner (...) We need to reduce the scope of facts we will establish because I am afraid that if we are too ambitious we may not be able to deliver. We will establish the facts but we must not establish the responsibility.*

**Statement:** Vehid Šehić, Citizens' Forum of Tuzla, BiH, Regional consultation with human rights organizations, Belgrade, Serbia, October 29th 2007.

*I think it's a good initiative worth supporting especially because I see that there is some energy in that direction but it is a very demanding project (...) The regional approach in documenting all victims and all missing persons is something we must not forget or postpone, and we must be very serious coordinated assignment undertaken in all countries in the region. Also, the regional initiative will systematically monitor war crimes trials the findings of which can contribute to establishing a variety of previously unknown facts. I think the initiative should be finalized.*

**Statement:** Katarina Kruhonja, Centre for Peace, Non-Violence and Human Rights, Croatia, Regional consultation with human rights organizations, Belgrade, Serbia, October 29th 2007.

**The political context of the past can create confusion: it is important to examine the facts about victims, as well as the facts that pre-**

**ceded the crimes and about the causes of war. Furthermore, the interpretation of these facts and the perspective from which they developed have great importance and should be examined critically.**

*When speaking about victims, the level at which it has all been done for years by some human rights organizations is very important. Facts are another important issue, but not only war related facts, but the facts about what preceded the war. Biljana [Kovačević-Vučo] talked about a political context, policies that caused the war. When I say that, I think about Serbia in the first place because that is the most complex and I would say the most significant issue. And also, that interpretation of facts which will differ depending on the angle and which will be a topic for discussion in the decades to come. I think we are only about to have a debate.*

**Statement:** Sonja Biserko, Helsinki Committee for Human Rights, Serbia, Regional consultation with human rights organizations, Belgrade, Serbia, October 29th 2007.

*In addition to establishing the truth, we also need to focus on admitting the truth. However, having in mind our experiences so far in the area of restoring violated human rights through institutions, we cannot be too optimistic because very few people received some sort of satisfaction. In addition to establishing the facts, we also need to research the cause of evil, of the ideology of evil and we need to establish the responsibility of the media because they can also be considered instrumental in the creation of the ideology of evil.*

**Statement:** Semiha Kačar, Sandžak Committee for the Protection of Human Rights and Freedoms, Serbia, Regional consultation with human rights organizations, Belgrade, Serbia, October 29th 2007.

*If you think that the commission will produce a report which will sit in someone's desk, then we don't need a commission. We have to very quickly move from finding the truth to telling the truth. So, this commission should interpret some facts without trying to draw conclusions or make things perfectly clear.*

**Statement:** Mirsad Tokača, Research and Documentation Center, BiH, Regional consultation with human rights organizations, Belgrade, Serbia, October 29th 2007.

*Facts are only a portion of the most important factor. You can't use false facts to draw a good conclusion, but you also can't try to form a commission which will tackle the truth, moral responsibility,*

*or reconciliation without at least some conclusions. You cannot distort reality, you cannot forge facts, you must not avoid inconvenient facts, as Weber says, but the interpretation of facts is our task.*

**Statement:** Biljana Kovačević-Vučo, Lawyers' Committee for Human Rights, Serbia, Regional consultation with human rights organizations, Belgrade, Serbia, October 29th 2007.

**We need to intensify the consultation process and create a coalition for advocating a regional body and a strategy for approaching the public, victims' associations, as well as national and international institutions.**

*It is important that we approach the public and prepare it for what comes next. And such occasional consultations are priceless because they allow us to coordinate activities and achieve a synergy effect. We as non-governmental organizations can do that much.*

**Statement:** Aleksandar Popov, Centre for Regionalism, Serbia, Regional consultation with human rights organizations, Belgrade, Serbia, October 29th 2007.

*Before we discuss regional bodies, I think we should first intensify the consultation process in the next year or two. And not only discuss but include a number of inventive suggestions and positive practices into our activity and, I would even say, in programmatic texts of the three non-governmental partner organizations.*

**Statement:** Gordana Bodog, Izmir Association, Croatia, Regional consultation with human rights organizations, Belgrade, Serbia, October 29th 2007.

*I believe that there will be much more of those who will support the very process of the creation of the commission if a broad based debate is initiated. I think we can find allies in these societies, victims' associations, and in many other places where we don't even expect to find them, but the problem is how to get the space for the public debate and to choose a proper strategy.*

**Statement:** Maja Stojanović, Youth Initiative for Human Rights, Serbia, Regional consultation with human rights organizations, Belgrade, Serbia, October 29th 2007.

*I think the commission, regional commission or whatever the name is, should be extended a little bit and not only be the responsibility of the three non-governmental organizations which initiated it and which will present the main pillar in the future, I hope, but to extend it to Macedonia and Kosovo, and to Bujanovac and Preševo, where*

*there is a lot to be done. The name of the commission should not be a problem as long as it is created and extended.*

**Statement:** Behxhet Shala, Committee for the Protection of Human Rights, Kosovo, Regional consultation with human rights organizations, Belgrade, Serbia, October 29th 2007.

**In order to establish the regional commission it is necessary to achieve the support and the cooperation of all the states in the region.**

*We cannot discuss an alternative commission and expect the government to support us. This is the chicken and the egg dilemma. As members of the civil society, non-governmental organizations dealing with human rights and transitional justice, we need to pressure the government to accept our results. We cannot get the support in advance because that would make us a government service which we don't want to be.*

**Statement:** Biljana Kovačević-Vučo, Lawyers' Committee for Human Rights, Serbia, Regional consultation with human rights organizations, Belgrade, Serbia, October 29th 2007.

*Our political elites led us to war (...) No matter who proposes to the Government of Montenegro that it creates this commission; it will create it right away and the commission, just like the rest of Montenegro, will serve as a cover, a democratic make-up for pleasing institutions.*

**Statement:** Sabina Talović, Citizens' Open Information Center Bona Fide, Regional consultation with human rights organizations, Belgrade, Serbia, October 29th 2007.

*I am personally against a state commission, but as Nataša mentioned, I believe it is crucial to create some sort of independent commission which will have some support or legitimacy from our national governments, maybe like the ICTY.*

**Statement:** Gordana Bosanac, Center for Peace Studies, Croatia, Regional consultation with human rights organizations, Belgrade, Serbia, October 29th 2007.

*As civil society organizations, we have to adopt a strategy aiming at achieving the support of all states for the commission. If it is not state-created, it should be given that status and I have two arguments corroborating that idea. First has to do with state, military, and civil archives (...) Second important issue is what to do with the results of the commission. If it's an informal initiative, I'm afraid it may end up like the history books Sonja Biserko mentioned. There is this alternative history textbook none of the countries in the region want to include in their curriculum because it is an unofficial initiative of historians.*

**Statement:** Andrej Nosov, Youth Initiative for Human Rights, Serbia, Regional consultation with human rights organizations, Belgrade, Serbia, October 29th 2007.

*We are in a state of a non-finished war rather than at the doorstep to building peace, so that this situation not only contributes to that but, I am sure, there is no chance that the governments of these three countries can agree on the creation of a regional commission.*

**Statement:** Aleksandar Popov, Centre for Regionalism, Serbia, Regional consultation with human rights organizations, Belgrade, Serbia, October 29th 2007.

*To turn the regional aspect in favour of what we want to make. So, let's forget institutions and national and regional commissions with the legitimacy of not only national governments but societies, too. Most human right abuses that happened were condoned by the majority and that same majority is now trying to cover it up. We can put our effort together and do something. That is the only thing we can do.*

**Statement:** Srđan Dvornik, Croatian Helsinki Committee for Human Rights, Regional consultation with human rights organizations, Belgrade, Serbia, October 29th 2007.

*I don't believe in an official state commission at all. There are people in these commissions who are responsible for the war and all its consequences: they are in no way interested in establishing the truth. They are doing everything they can to cover it up. So, I don't believe them but I don't exclude the option to cooperate with them to a point.*

**Statement:** Behxhet Shala, Committee for the Protection of Human Rights, Kosovo, Regional consultation with human rights organizations, Belgrade, Serbia, October 29th 2007.

**Non-governmental organizations can organize a public debate on the initiative to establish a regional body, but they cannot form a commission which would be powerful enough establish the facts and secure their recognition.**

*Even if 70 or 80% of the people in Serbia supported the politics of Slobodan Milošević, in a region like the Western Balkans, the only way to do something is to find ways for these governments which have no political will for this, to find a model, a way, to make them accept the responsibility of establishing the truth. Without it we will lose the battle with the heritage of the past, we will end up having the same interpretations that exist today and we leave no hope for any steps forward by future generations. The battle will be lost if we are satisfied with it and*

*settle for the other level. We can only help, we are not political factors.*

**Statement:** Nataša Kandić, Humanitarian Law Center, Serbia, Regional consultation with human rights organizations, Belgrade, Serbia, October 29th 2007.

**Regional approach does not mean forcing a uniformed opinion but serves to establish the complete truth about the past.**

*Regional cooperation isn't some kind of enforced common standpoint, rather it is the only way to establish the truth in a very complex situation such as ours and in that respect it will be pointless to make any nationalistic remarks since we will be demonstrating in practice what it means to accept responsibility, even if we are not guilty we will accept responsibility that crimes committed on behalf of our nations are established once for all.*

**Statement:** Srđan Dvornik, Croatian Helsinki Committee for Human Rights, Regional consultation with human rights organizations, Belgrade, Serbia, October 29th 2007.

**It is necessary to create a Web portal to share information and facts relevant to the dealing with the past.**

*Creating a web portal or a web site where we can all be linked with our archives and documentation seems like a good idea. I think it is long overdue and we have to do it as soon as possible to make our books, films, archives, and documentation available to all those dealing with this issue. We have to open communication lines with all state institutions in each individual country which are dealing with this issue in this way. They should not be excluded.*

**Statement:** Sonja Biserko, Helsinki Committee for Human Rights, Serbia, Regional consultation with human rights organizations, Belgrade, Serbia, October 29th 2007.

*This Internet portal Sonja Biserko and somebody else mentioned should really be created. It would be very important partly because there are many of us individuals or small organizations doing a lot in their local communities. And such a portal and cooperation with all of you would mean a significant support, at least in the domain of physical security of human rights activists in their local communities.*

**Statement:** Sabina Talović, Citizens' Open Information Center Bona Fide, Regional consultation with human rights organizations, Belgrade, Serbia, October 29th 2007.