

# !The Voice of Victims



*Shyhrete Berisha is one of the three survivors of the massacre of more than forty Albanian women, children and men of the Berisha family in Suva Reka, on March 26, 1999. She testified three times before the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia about how she had lost her husband, four children and forty members of her extended family in an attack by the Serbian police.*

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My name is Shyhrete and I am 37 years old. I lived in Suva Reka with my husband Nexhat, our two daughters Majlinda (1983) and Herolinda (1985) and our two sons Altin (1988) and Redon (1997). Our home was across the road from the headquarters of the Suva Reka police. I lived with my family on the left side of the house and Nexhat's nephew Faton Berisha lived on the right side of the house.

Late in 1998 the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) rented our house. Our family moved in with my parents in Mushtisht, which is about 9 kilometers away and Faton moved his family to his uncles.

The OSCE evacuated from the area of Suva Reka on the 20/03/1999. On 21/03/1999 my husband called me on the telephone to come back to our house with the children. We cleaned the house because we wanted to move back in soon. We were staying with Faton and his family.

During Wednesday 24/03/1999 there was a lot of movement of Serbian police and Serbian vehicles. Throughout the day and night I saw tanks, buses full of policeman, »Pitzgauer« and military vehicles.

About 5am on Thursday the 25/03/1999 there was a knock at the front door and I got out of bed and opened the door. There were three Serbian policemen standing at the door and they

were pointing their automatic weapons at my chest. The tall policemen was poking my chest with the end of his weapon and yelling at me in Serbian, "Where are your guests? Where are the Americans? Where is NATO?" Then he asked me where my husband was and told me to call him immediately. My husband came to the door and the police took him outside and they walked towards our house. I saw that there was a large tank parked about 20 meters away pointing straight at the house.

They went to our house. The police could not open doors of the OSCE offices upstairs so they kicked the doors in. The police were swearing and screaming at my husband and they were hitting him as hard as they could.

I saw that the tank was still there and there was now a truck in the courtyard. Police were loading things into the truck from our house. The police stole a lot of valuable equipment like televisions, computers and the heater, everything they could carry.

My sister-in-law, Fatime and I went towards the front door when we saw the first three police with my husband walking back towards Faton's house. My husband stood slowly and they walked into the house. I could see that my husband had been beaten and his face was all black.

The tall policeman told us all to sit down and he said in Serbian, "Give us money, otherwise we will kill you and burn your house with your children." Fatime had some money on her chest and she tried to pull some notes out but the policeman with the black gloves put his hands on her chest and grabbed all the money. I had 3000 DM on my chest and I gave it to the policeman with the black gloves because I was so scared he would want to undress me. They finally left about 6.30am to 7am.

We were all afraid to stay in our house so we went to my husband's uncle, Vesel Berisha's house, which is about 30m behind our houses. We wanted to escape but throughout the night we heard gunshots and we were too afraid to leave the house. In the house was my whole family, and the following people: Faton Berisha (27), his mother Fatime (48), his sister Sherine (17), his wife Sebahate (25) and their two sons Ismet (1996) and Eron (1998), Vesel's wife Hava Berisha (60), Vesel's sons Sedat (44), Bujar (40), Nexhmedin (37), Bujar's wife Flora (38), Nexhmedin's wife who was 8 months pregnant Lirije (24), Sedat's wife Vjollca (37), Sedat's daughter Dafina Berisha (16), and sons Drilon (14) and Gnuoz (9), Bujar's sons Vlorjan (17) and Edon (14), and daughter Dorentina (4). Only three people that slept in the house that night survived what was about to happen.

About 12.20pm on Friday the 26/03/1999 I saw a large number of people leave the police station from across the road. There was about 30 of them, some were in civilian clothes and some were wearing police uniforms. They were all canying automatic weapons. Sedat looked

out the window and he said, "They are all from Suva Reka." They ran into Ismet Kuci's house.

The next thing I remember I heard a Serbian man yelling out in Albanian, "Bujar, where are you?"; I recognized the voice as being a Serbian man called Zoran. Zoran spoke very good Albanian and he used to drive the Albanian bus. Zoran then yelled out in Serbian, "Where do you have your Americans? Get out here." First, Bujar's mother Hava walked outside to speak to Zoran. All the men and children went down into the basement of the house. I heard Zoran scream out in Serbian, "Where is Bujar? Get him out here now." Bujar walked outside and asked Zoran in Albanian, "What do you want?" We were still coming out and I was looking for my children and everyone was saying, "Hurry, hurry." I heard two gunshots and Bujar's wife Flora cried out, "They just shot my Bujar!" It was worse than the movies. Everybody was running for the back door and there was a lot of confusion. We were all barefoot as there was no time to put shoes on.

We ran out the back and towards our house, I saw that we were surrounded by police and civilians everywhere. I recognised the man who stopped my husband Nexhat was the man called "Miscovic", the owner of the Boss Hotel. One of the policemen grabbed Faton by the hand and Faton's mother Fatima was trying to stand between the policeman and Faton. The same thing happened when they grabbed Nexhmedin, his wife Lirije, who is pregnant tried to step between them.

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I remember seeing an empty yellow truck parked out the front of our house and on the ground in front of the truck was the body of a large man laying face down.

I heard "Miscovic" say to Nexhat, "Raise your hands in the air." When he did, "Miscovic" shot him in the back three times. At that moment I remember Nexhmedin and his wife Lirije started to run when they saw what had happened to my husband Nexhat. Nexhmedin was pulling his wife by the hand and one of the civilians was yelling out in serbian, "Shoot. What are you waiting for?"

At that moment the shooting started without stopping and there was a lot of confusion. We started to run in all directions. Majlinda with my two sons went one way and I went another way. We stopped at the place, which used to be an Albanian coffee shop and there we found three other Berisha families. The women and children from our house were there and within a minute Majlinda and my two sons arrived from another direction. I saw that Altin was bleeding and I asked him what happened. He told me that they shot him in the hand and leg but not to worry. The Serbians were shooting at my children while they were running away. His heart was beating so fast and his face was all pale.

The police had arrived and screamed at us in Serbian to go inside. We went inside and sat down when they walked in and started shooting us. I was shot in the right shoulder and I

fell to the ground. When they had finished shooting they walked outside and I could hear them speaking but I could not tell what they were saying. Some of the people were still alive, not even wounded. I don't know how they survived. There were about 40 to 50 people there, mostly women and children, there was only four men.

My children Majlinda and Redon were not wounded. At that moment Redon was saying to Majlinda, "I want to go to mum." I took Redon from Majlinda and I took a bottle of milk, which I had in my trousers, and I gave it to Redon.

They must have heard us speaking because they came to the door and threw something like a handgrenade into the room. I turned to look at my children. I saw my son Redon was sitting there with blood all over him and he was still holding his bottle of milk. I saw Majlinda and half her head was missing. I saw Sebahate and half her head was missing as well. I slowly touched my youngest son Redon with my feet but he was dead. From the door they were throwing something and they were precise because they were hitting the heads.

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They did not come in, they remained at the door. The two children of Sebahate, Ismet and Eron were still alive, they were crying. Ismet the 3 year old was crying and calling out everybody's name and asking for water. He was saying, "Mum my leg is hurting."

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After throwing those things the Serbians moved away from the doorway. I heard the Serbians talking and one of them said something about placing our bodies into a truck. Vjollca and Altin's heads were close to mine and I told them that they were going to place us into a truck and that they should not move and act dead. Then the Serbians came again. They hit Eron with that thing they were throwing. It hit me in the right thigh and went straight through my leg and hit Eron. Eron did not move anymore, I think he died as soon as he was hit. I later realised that I had been hit in the stomach as well but I did not realise it at the time.

They walked into the room and started to load the bodies onto a truck and I remember that I could still hear people moaning. They dragged my body by the leg and by the arm while I kept my eyes closed and mouth slightly open so I could breathe. I remember that while they were dragging my body one of the men say in Serbian, "Fuck life. What kind of life is this? I can't handle this anymore." The other one that was dragging me was just saying, "Hurry, hurry. We have got to clean this place."

They placed my body on a stretcher and removed two gold chains from around my neck by finding the latch and unlocking them. They threw my body onto the back of the truck. I landed on a number of bodies and above me they threw my oldest daughter Majlinda. When they had finished they pulled the curtain of the truck shut and the truck started to move. I

couldn't breathe from the smell of the blood and bodies. When I looked I saw the body of my son Altin and called out to him to see if he was alive but then I saw that his head was divided. His eyes and mouth were open.

At that moment Vjollca must have heard me and raised her head and said, "Shyhrete, are you still alive?" I replied that I was still alive. I asked if Gramoz was still alive and she answered, "Yes". I suggested to Vjollca that we jump from the truck. She said, "No we shouldn't jump because the truck is going too fast but when they bury us we should escape from the dirt." I said, "If they bury us, all these bodies will be above us and then they will place dirt on top and there is no way that we will be able to get out."

I told Vjollca that we should jump from the truck from the back, and not from the sides because they would see us in the mirrors. There was a rip in the truck curtain at the back so I checked to see if there was anyone following the truck. I was so injured that I did not think about it, I just jumped. I injured my forehead in the fall. I later realised that I had jumped out in the village of Malsia E Re and I was on the main road from Suva Reka to Prizren.

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An old man I later met in Kukas told me that he had seen me fall from the truck and he told two young men to run over and place me into a car. They drove me to a house nearby and placed me in the courtyard of the house. The young men drove me to another village called Grejkoc where I received medical treatment. Later two cars of KLA soldiers arrived and they transferred me to the village of Budakova. The doctor who treated me there recognised me because we used to catch the same bus. He treated my wounds and there were twelve on my body.

When the soldiers picked me up in Grejkoc, I asked them if they would follow the truck I rolled off and find out where they bury the bodies of my family. Five days later a soldier came and told me that there were two mass graves in the area of Ljubizhda and that the soldiers had marked the graves.

People have told me that Vjollca and Gramoz did survive and are still in Kosovo in the village of Caparc.

*Witness statement by Shyhrete Berisha given to ICTY investigators as evidence in "Prosecutor v. Slobodan Milosevic" (ICTY, IT-02-54: Milosevic, Exhibit P00252)*