

Consultation with the local community on the RECOM Initiative

Pejë/Peć, Kosovo
January 28th 2010

Consultation with the local community in Pejë/Peć, Kosovo were organized by Syri and Vizionit organization (Kosovo) in cooperation with the Humanitarian Law Center (HLC Kosovo). Thirty-seven participants, including victims' family members, associations of the families of the missing, veterans and war invalids, and representatives of non-governmental organizations attended the event. Veton Mujaj spoke during the Why RECOM session, while Nora Ahmetaj (human rights activist, Kosovo) and Bekim Blakaj (Humanitarian Law Centre, Kosovo) informed the participants about the course of the consultation process to date and positive experiences of other truth commissions around the world. Besarta Vasija (HLC, Kosovo) moderated the discussion. At the end of the debate, 34 individuals and representatives of various organizations joined the Coalition for RECOM.

Opinions, suggestions, and recommendations of the participants:

RECOM should clarify the case of each victim.

Fortunately or unfortunately, I don't really know how to say that, we are dealing with a state that does not really understand what dialogue is. I would like to commend and congratulate all of you who started this initiative and I wish you the best of luck and success in the future, but I would also like to ask you to undertake concrete steps because you have the support of our association of families. Please do whatever you think you can to shed light on the fate of the missing, all missing persons on the territory of the former Yugoslavia and especially those in Kosovo. (Emine Bytyqi from the Raushiq/Raušić village, Kosovo, Consultation with the local community on the Initiative for RECOM, Pejë/Peć, Kosovo, January 28th 2010.)

War crimes perpetrators should not be forgiven their crimes.

I support the initiative you started as well as all of you contributing to it. I understand you expect us to give you specific answers now... Can we forgive war crime perpetrators? No! Why forgive war crimes when other crimes are not forgiven? You should understand that those who committed war crimes in Auschwitz are still wanted for the crimes they committed. Criminals should be punished for their crimes because if they are not, they will commit the same crimes again in the future. (Tahir Rraci, former political prisoner in the Dubrava prison in Kosovo, Consultation with the local community on the Initiative for RECOM, Pejë/Peć, Kosovo, January 28th 2010.)

We can hardly wait to see some of the war crimes perpetrators sentenced and the idea that they should ask us to forgive them, the criminals who are still walking around as free men, is something I, as a victim, cannot even say out loud. (Emine Bytyqi from the Raushiq/Raušić village, Kosovo, Consultation with the local community on the Initiative for RECOM, Pejë/Peć, Kosovo, January 28th 2010.)

Forgiveness should be conditional on the ability of war crime perpetrators to give information about war crimes and other perpetrators.

If a war crime perpetrator can offer information, let's say about the crime that took place in my village and tell us where the missing persons are, then we may consider forgiving that person. (Emine Bytyqi from the Raushiq/Raušić village, Kosovo, Consultation with the local community on the Initiative for RECOM, Pejë/Peć, Kosovo, January 28th 2010.)

It is too early to debate on the structure and the composition of the commission.

I think that you will have our support but it is too early to debate about its structure and composition. If the decision to form this commission is ratified by our respective parliaments, then we will discuss the possible ways the commission can be organized. (Tahir Rraci, former political prisoner in the Dubrava prison in Kosovo, Consultation with the local community on the Initiative for RECOM, Pejë/Peć, Kosovo, January 28th 2010.)

RECOM is a waste of time.

I wish you could succeed! I wish you could help us! God bless all those working for these people! But I think you dragged us here for nothing. I wish you the best of luck! (Isa Gashi, head of the community of the Pavljan/Pavlan village, Kosovo, Consultation with the local community on the Initiative for RECOM, Pejë/Peć, Kosovo, January 28th 2010.)

RECOM should include the state to work alongside family members of the missing.

Yes, I think family members of the missing should be involved, too, but, it should primarily be the job of government institutions to deal with this, in a form of a government delegation... (Emine Bytyqi from the Raushiq/Raušić village, Kosovo, Consultation with the local community on the Initiative for RECOM, Pejë/Peć, Kosovo, January 28th 2010.)

I don't trust this government which has been unable for the past 10, 11 years to do anything. If there are no victims' family members in this commission, I don't really think we can do anything. (Isa Gashi, head of the community of the Pavljan/Pavlan village, Kosovo, Consultation with the local community on the Initiative for RECOM, Pejë/Peć, Kosovo, January 28th 2010.)

The first step should be taken by the Republic of Serbia: Serbia should publicly admit its crimes and apologize.

Should we apologize to Serbia? I think that Serbia should apologize to us first and admit the crimes and then it is up to our honour and conscience to see what we are going to do next, but it is clear... We are the second step. (Tahir Rraci, former political prisoner in the Dubrava prison in Kosovo, Consultation with the local community on the Initiative for RECOM, Pejë/Peć, Kosovo, January 28th 2010.)

A three year mandate is too short for the work of the commission.

I think that this commission will not be able to finish the job at hand in three years, maybe not even in 11 years. Look at what they are doing with Šešelj. Excuse me, but they have been trying him for years and they can't finish the trial, the Hague Tribunal can't finish the job, and you think you can do it in three years. The entire world proved he is a criminal, and the Hague Tribunal can't sentence him, yet you think you can do it in three years. That's really not going to happen. (Junuz Gutic from the Raušić/Raushiq village, Kosovo, Consultation with the local community on the Initiative for RECOM, Pejë/Peć, Kosovo, January 28th 2010.)

The commission should define the time period which will be the subject of its investigation.
I really think you should deal with the crimes committed in the period between 1990 and 1999. Anything that happened afterwards should be tackled by the government, the police, courts, etc. simply because those crimes happened on their watch. (Isa Gashi, head of the community of the Pavljan/Pavlan village, Kosovo, Consultation with the local community on the Initiative for RECOM, Pejë/Peć, Kosovo, January 28th 2010.)

You said that historians and psychiatrists would be members of the commission. If historians start analysing events starting in the 1980s, they are not historians but persons who experienced the same things you and I did. But, they can also start from 1912 and the suffering of the Albanians or from 1945 and how many people went to prison in Pejë/Peć and never got out, how many were executed without a due trial, and all the other torture we experienced... I remember all these events, 1945, 1947, 1956, 1963, I remember it all. If you want to start from the year 1991, then do so, but I think that if we don't start from the beginning we won't be able to do anything. (Isa Gashi, head of the community of the Pavljan/Pavlan village, Kosovo, Consultation with the local community on the Initiative for RECOM, Pejë/Peć, Kosovo, January 28th 2010.)

The commission should first start working and then get additional tasks.

We will have a commission which will be formed, but we also want to put so much on its plate that it won't be able to do it (...). Not even the government can solve all these problems. We should help form this commission as soon as possible and start dealing with the fate of the missing first of all (...) and if this commission can do that within the time frame set for it, then we can give it additional tasks. But it should start working first of all. (Tahir Rraci, former political prisoner in the Dubrava prison in Kosovo, Consultation with the local community on the Initiative for RECOM, Pejë/Peć, Kosovo, January 28th 2010.)