

National consultation with religious communities on the RECOM Initiative

Prizren, Kosovo

July 29, 2010

The consultation in Prizren was organized by the Humanitarian Law Center, Kosovo. The gathering was attended by 46 participants – representatives of the Islamic Community, the Catholic Church, the Serbian Orthodox Church, and the Protestant-Evangelical Church. The discussion was moderated by Bekim Blakaj (Humanitarian Law Center, Kosovo), and the introductory speeches were given by Veton Mujaj (Syri i Vizionit, Peć/Pejë, Kosovo), Nataša Kandić (Humanitarian Law Center, Belgrade, Serbia), and Ismail Hasani, religious sociologist from Priština/Prishtinë. At the beginning of the consultation Ruzhdi Rexha, vice president of the Prizren municipality greeted the participants and expressed his support for the RECOM Initiative. Six media outlets reported from the consultation: RTV Besa, TV Prizren, Koha Ditore, TV Kosova, Radio Kosova, and KTV.

Opinions, Suggestions, and Recommendations of the Participants

Representatives of religious communities must support victims instead of manipulating them.

...I call upon representatives of religious communities to take this last opportunity and show that in the Balkans, in this part of Europe, there are truly people who are willing and capable of... dealing with reality, with what happened here and not to manipulate the victims from the wars waged over the course of the 20th century, for their own interest on religious holidays, anniversaries and so on. We have to make it clear to the victims that we openly support them. (Ismail Hasani, religious sociologist from Priština/Prishtinë, Kosovo. National consultation with religious communities on the RECOM Initiative, Prizren, Kosovo, July 29, 2010).

There is a real need to hold public hearings. That is how we can learn the truth.

I support Mrs. Kandić's opinion on this and this initiative because there is a need to hold public hearings. People need to tell their stories and it will not take anything away from religious communities, ethnic communities, or the people. On the contrary, we will be able to look at things from a different perspective, to deal with the situation, and to learn what the reality is.

(*Ramadan Shkodra, Presidency of the Islamic Community, Priština/Prishtinë, Kosovo. National Consultation with religious communities on the RECOM Initiative, Prizren, Kosovo, July 29, 2010*).

The Initiative for RECOM is really very important.

On behalf of the Supreme Presidency of the Islamic Community, I would like to convey most sincere greetings from the esteemed mufti and the entire presidency of the Islamic Community along with their support for RECOM, which is truly an important initiative. (*Fitim Flugaj, Presidency of the Islamic Community, Priština/Prishtinë, Kosovo. National consultation with religious communities on the RECOM Initiative, Prizren, Kosovo, July 29, 2010*).

The RECOM Initiative can raise awareness and help our societies deal with our past.

I believe that the RECOM Initiative can help religious communities, the society, and everybody else raise awareness in our societies and help deal with the events from our past. The Bible says: "You will learn the truth which will set you free! The truth will set you free." No one should be afraid of the truth. Really, only lies should be afraid of the truth... We don't only want to support the Initiative, we want to become one of its active parts. (Artur Krasniqi, President of the Protestant-Evangelistic Church of Kosovo, Priština/Prishtinë, Kosovo. National consultation with religious communities on the RECOM Initiative, Prizren, Kosovo, July 29, 2010).

All religious communities should be unanimous in distancing themselves from all of the activities that led to the war and to condemn them. Only then can we truly focus on advocating a multi-ethnic and multi-religious life among the various ethnic groups.

...and once more, we openly testify that the Catholic Church is ready for the dialog as it has always been throughout history, and we do hope that such initiatives and forums can help us achieve unity and we think that all religious communities should be unanimous in distancing themselves from all of the activities that led to the war and to condemn them. Only then can we truly focus on advocating a multi-ethnic and multi-religious life among the various ethnic groups. (Don Pal Tunaj, Catholic Church in Kosovo, Peć/Pejë, Kosovo. National consultation with religious communities on the RECOM Initiative, Prizren, Kosovo, July 29, 2010).

Religious communities should encourage victims to testify about the crimes.

...I think that as religious communities we should be the stronger side of the RECOM Initiative and use our capabilities and influence to encourage victims to testify about the crimes committed against them. (Rexhep Lushta, Presidency of the Islamic Community, Priština/Prishtinë, Kosovo. National consultation with religious communities on the RECOM Initiative, Prizren, Kosovo, July 29, 2010).

I don't understand the definition of the term "victim". There must not be an 'equal sign' between a victim and an aggressor.

...I don't quite understand the definition of the term 'victim' and who can be qualified as a victim. This text here calls for peace and, in a way, puts an 'equal sign' between us[ethnic Albanians] and the aggressor, the initiator of war. I think that this must be clarified because this is not going to be a very successful initiative if we are the only ones asked to forgive. (Nusret Abazira, Supreme Council of the Islamic Community, Orahovac/Rahovec, Kosovo. National Consultation with religious communities on the RECOM Initiative, Prizren, Kosovo, July 29, 2010).

Theologians should carry messages of reconciliation.

...since we are God's servants and theologians of various denominations, we should be the ones to carry messages of reconciliation; we should always tell the truth, we need to believe what we say, and do our best to achieve that. (Ajni Sinani, theologian, Islamic University, Kosovo. National consultation with religious communities on the RECOM Initiative, Prizren, Kosovo, July 29, 2010).

Discrimination should be included in RECOM's mandate.

In the early 90s I experienced a very unpleasant situation. I was overwhelmed with a feeling of being discriminated against. I think it is a very unique feeling but I have read all these documents, very carefully and there is not a word about discrimination... Discrimination, first of all, with respect to segregating children... There was discrimination in the pay teachers received. My colleague, Živana, an English language teacher just like I am, earned twice as much I did. (Greta Kaçinari, Catholic Church in Kosovo, Kosovo. National consultation with religious communities on the RECOM Initiative, Prizren, Kosovo, July 29, 2010).

If we are talking about responsibility, we should begin with ourselves instead of pointing a finger at other people.

... if we are talking about responsibility, we should begin with ourselves instead of pointing a finger at other people because judging others, without previously dealing with our own faults is the main cause of hatred and conflicts. (Brother Nofont, Serbian Orthodox Church, Visoki Dečani Monastery, Prizren, Kosovo, National Consultation with religious communities on the RECOM Initiative, Prizren, Kosovo, July 29, 2010).

We support the RECOM Initiative

We thank the organizers of this gathering and those who launched this initiative. We will do our best to support this initiative in all the aspects of the project. (Brother Nofont, Serbian Orthodox Church, Visoki Dečani Monastery, Prizren, Kosovo. National consultation with religious communities on the RECOM Initiative, Prizren, Kosovo, July 29, 2010).

The mandate of RECOM should include psychological torture as well

I want to give another recommendation – to include psychological torture as one of the human rights violations defined by the mandate of RECOM. Many victims in various conflicts were exposed to psychological torture. (Liridon Kadriu, activist of the Islamic Community in Kosovo, Priština/Prishtinë, Kosovo. National consultation with religious communities on the RECOM Initiative, Prizren, Kosovo, July 29, 2010).

What exactly can we do for the Initiative?

I am asking Mrs. Kandić: “What exactly can we do for the Initiative?” If you can give us instructions for 20 or 30 persons, we can each complete let’s say 30 assignments, and if we all finish our assignments it will be 300 assignments checked-off the to-do list. Just give us precise assignments so we know what to do. (Ramadan Shkodra, Presidency of the Islamic Community, Priština/Prishtinë, Kosovo. National consultation with religious communities on the RECOM Initiative, Prizren, Kosovo, July 29, 2010).