

## **Regional Consultation on the Initiative for RECOM with Representatives of Religious Communities and Churches**

**Sarajevo, BiH  
November 4, 2010**

A regional consultation on the initiative for RECOM with representatives of religious communities and churches was organized by the *BH Journalists Association* and the Legal Assistance and Information Center from BiH, both members of the Coalition for RECOM from BiH. The consultation was attended by 51 participants, including high religious officials and representatives of religious communities, non-governmental organizations, and academic institutions. The event was observed by representatives of Macedonian and Croatian embassies in Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as representatives of international organizations based in the country, such as the UNDP, the OSCE Mission to BiH, and the Delegation of the European Commission in BiH.

Unfortunately, though invited, representatives from Kosovo, representatives of the Orthodox Church from Serbia and from Kosovo, and representatives of the Catholic Church from Croatia did not attend the consultation. Further, due to an organizational oversight, organizers of the event had to ask the representative of the Montenegro Orthodox Church, Bishop Mihajlo to leave the consultation as his presence was not approved by the representatives of the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Catholic Church who were in attendance. The consultation was dominated by discussion on the establishment of RECOM. The discussion was exceptionally tolerant and created a positive, constructive atmosphere, which resulted in a conclusion that it was truly necessary for churches and religious communities to cooperate in this process. The media showed a huge interest in this consultation, which was reported on by over 20 journalists from the region. Serbian RTS TV station and Blic daily newspaper sent their teams from Belgrade and Križ Života (the Cross of Life) sent their journalist from Croatia.

### **Comments, Suggestions, and Recommendations of the Participants at the Consultation:**

**Do we have the strength to listen to other people's disturbing testimonies? Serbians wounds can hurt, too.**

*... A tall, young girl missing a leg was among them... She was sweating profusely while practicing her first steps after the amputation. I was deeply upset by her troubled face. That's when I clearly realized that Serbian wounds can hurt, too. I repeat, Serbian wounds hurt, too. That is why we need this regional commission to uncover the facts about war crimes and other serious human rights violations that happened in the states formed by the secession from the former Yugoslavia. It is particularly badly needed by the families of the killed and missing from all three national entities in Bosnia and Herzegovina (...) Do we have enough respect and patience to listen to the testimonies of others, to learn about their painful truth, about the last days of their killed or missing family members? (Msg. Mato Zovkić, Vrhbosanska Archbishopry, BiH, Regional Consultation on the Initiative for RECOM with Representatives of Religious Communities and Churches, Sarajevo, BiH, November 4, 2010).*

**Acknowledging and respecting truth and justice are important prerequisites for support to RECOM.**

*The Islamic Community will take part in all RECOM-like projects if truth and justice are acknowledged and respected. Our main requests are:*

- 1. The acknowledgment of the genocide committed against the Muslims as stipulated in the International Court of Justice decision, which forbids the denial of the genocide, such as the law prohibiting the denial of the holocaust;*
- 2. The arrest and transfer to the ICTY of all war crimes suspects such as Ratko Mladić and Goran Hadžić;*
- 3. Proper compensation for the emotional suffering and pecuniary damages to the victims of the genocide, which was mostly experienced by Muslims throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina and particularly in Srebrenica. (Husein Effendi Smajić, Mufti of Sarajevo, BiH, Regional Consultation on the Initiative for RECOM with Representatives of Religious Communities and Churches, Sarajevo, BiH, November 4, 2010).*

**The time has come for religious leaders to finally meet.**

*Serbian president Tadić is meeting his Croatian colleague Josipović today. But those meetings must be trilateral; they have to include the Bosnian president, too. That would mean something to everyone. Also, it is important for our religious leaders to meet, too. It is true that Patriarch Irinej of Serbia has not met the Archbishop of Zagreb or the Reis-ul-ulema of Bosnia and Herzegovina yet. They have to meet, because such meetings carry a powerful symbolic message. (Živica Tucić, Religious Analyst, Religious Information Agency, Belgrade, Serbia, Regional Consultation on the Initiative for RECOM with Representatives of Religious Communities and Churches, Sarajevo, BiH, November 4, 2010).*

**Further steps towards building RECOM are expected. We have to admit to ourselves the truth about the suffering of others.**

*Now, the question is how we treat the innocent victims. I think that we must honour them with truth, especially when it comes to recognizing the suffering of victims and counting and acknowledging them. So, in my opinion, truth comes before all (...) I see here that the Statute is being drafted, which is definitely a step further from the declaration on the establishment of RECOM... for that reason it is very important that Christian churches, with the theology of togetherness, redemption, and reconciliation, give their contribution to the establishment of RECOM. We have to admit our own truth, we have to admit the truth about the suffering of others, and we have to, based on that, start building our repentance... I think that the time to do that is now, and that we will do it while searching for ways of how to further build RECOM. (Andrija Kopilović, Pro-Rector of the Institute of Theology and Catechism of the Catholic Diocese of Subotica, Serbia, Regional Consultation on the Initiative for RECOM with Representatives of Religious Communities and Churches, Sarajevo, BiH, November 4, 2010).*

**Establishing the facts about suffering and war crimes has a therapeutic effect on society.**

*Establishing the facts about the victims of war crimes and their suffering has a significant therapeutic effect. Seeking forgiveness, dealing with our own wrongdoings, trying to disperse hatred, and preventing blindness for the suffering of others and the forgetting of the plight of victims should be in the centre of our efforts. And I must say that we owe gratitude to RECOM for not diminishing the role of religions in the process of equipping people with the tools*

*necessary for finding truth, justice, and forgiveness. Religion makes us alert to other people's suffering and makes us become engaged in the creation of a better world. (Message from Fra. Mija Džolan, Regional Consultation on the Initiative for RECOM with Representatives of Religious Communities and Churches, Sarajevo, BiH, November 4, 2010).*

**It is important to make every nation deal with the wrongdoings of their own members.**

*... The collection of facts is an arduous and very important job. It is important to create an atmosphere in which it is possible to talk about it. It is important that everybody deals with their own misdeeds, because it helps develop a sense that the wrongdoings committed on our behalf cannot be good for us. Also, victims should be allowed to refuse to speak... (Boško Teodosić, representative of the Dabro-Bosnian Archbishopry, Regional Consultation on the Initiative for RECOM with Representatives of Religious Communities and Churches, Sarajevo, BiH, November 4, 2010).*

**We should create national commissions before establishing a regional commission.**

*We no longer deny the fact that other people hurt, too, we no longer turn a blind eye on other victims... the regional approach of RECOM implies that the war was regional. I think it was a little bit different... I think that Bosnia and Herzegovina, even more so than Croatia and Serbia, needs to have a national commission which would help us deal with ourselves. From that national level we can make a regional commission. Either way, what truly matters is that no victim is forgotten. Let's be honest with each other and present the facts. Each victim has a first and last name - and whether it's RECOM or any other organization - they must compile a register of victims, stating the full name of each victim. (Vanja Jovanović, Priest, Old Church in Sarajevo, BiH, Regional Consultation on the Initiative for RECOM with Representatives of Religious Communities and Churches, Sarajevo, BiH, November 4, 2010).*

**A representative of protestant communities should attend consultations like this, enjoying the support of the Interreligious Council of BiH.**

*We should urge members of the Interreligious Council of BiH to support the idea that at least one representative of all of the protestant communities attends such consultations. (Radivoj Konstantinović, Christian Adventist Church in BiH, Regional Consultation on the Initiative for RECOM with Representatives of Religious Communities and Churches, Sarajevo, BiH, November 4, 2010).*

**The Initiative for RECOM should be understood as beneficial for victims.**

*The positive, peaceful influence religions have is immeasurable, but only if religions are not subject to political manipulation. RECOM should infiltrate those places where religions exist in the form of faith-based communities, as generators of inner strength, spirituality, and meaning – all of those religious products (...) We believe that all definitions of RECOM should include the principles necessary for building a healthy society, creating reconciliation, and promoting humanity, so that we can make a normal society (...) the most fundamental recommendation is that the Initiative for RECOM is understood as beneficial for victims and useful for their full recovery. (Prof. Dr. Fra Ivo Marković, Interreligious Service "Face to Face," BiH, Regional Consultation on the Initiative for RECOM with Representatives of Religious Communities and Churches, Sarajevo, BiH, November 4, 2010).*

**RECOM must make a special plan for each area.**

*As religious communities, we should not harbour criminals regardless of whose house or backyard they found refuge. I think that religious communities must play a more significant role, no matter what ideals it may stand up against. If someone took a life or destroyed a family, we must wish for the justice of man and the justice of God to be served. That will ultimately bring reconciliation (...) We must make a separate plan for each area and adapt it to the conditions of a specific event, the event that turned some people into victims. (Dragi Kostadinovski, Arch-Hierarchical Deputy, Orthodox Church of Macedonia, Regional Consultation on the Initiative for RECOM with Representatives of Religious Communities and Churches, Sarajevo, BiH, November 4, 2010).*

**It is necessary to create an inter-disciplinary theological platform on the causes and consequences of recent wars.**

*When I was in Belgrade I suggested we make an inter-disciplinary theological platform which would in its discourse deal with the causes and the consequences of recent wars in the former Yugoslavia – a platform that would deal with the so-called contextual political theology which poses an essential anthropological question: where was man during the war in the former Yugoslavia and how did God leave man? (Nikola Knežević, Faculty of Protestant Theology, Novi Sad, Serbia, Regional Consultation on the Initiative for RECOM with Representatives of Religious Communities and Churches, Sarajevo, BiH, November 4, 2010).*

**We should expect religious communities to be the place where the word about the Initiative for RECOM would be spread. We should not expect religious leaders to advocate the Initiative for RECOM.**

*Religious communities and churches can be the place where the word about this topic is spread, but they should not be expected to advocate for it. I think it is important that RECOM counts on members from various religious communities, on believers who put God before all other things who would support this initiative for that reason. (Amra Pandžo, Mali Koraci (Small Steps) Association for Dialogue in Family and in Society, BiH, Regional Consultation on the Initiative for RECOM with Representatives of Religious Communities and Churches, Sarajevo, BiH, November 4, 2010).*

**We must not make a distinction between small-scale and large-scale crimes.**

*... There can be no distinction between small and large-scale crimes. We don't want to forget any crimes. We must not forget the crime of the persecution and torture of over 20,000 people in Pešteri, who experienced the most horrific forms of torture during the regime of Slobodan Milošević. I think that this initiative is particularly important and that you can count on the Islamic Community in Serbia, that all our available resources and capacities will be at your disposal. (Muamer Zukorlić, President of the Meshihat of the Islamic Community in Serbia, Regional Consultation on the Initiative for RECOM with Representatives of Religious Communities and Churches, Sarajevo, BiH, November 4, 2010).*

**We are ready to offer any kind of support to RECOM so that justice is served for each and every victim.**

*We are ready to support the RECOM in any way we can because we want to do something useful for the victims, help relieve the pain of the survivors, and make sure justice is served. (Skender*

Buzaku, Islamic Community in Macedonia, Regional Consultation on the Initiative for RECOM with Representatives of Religious Communities and Churches, Sarajevo, BiH, November 4, 2010).

**RECOM should collect enough facts for the historians to be able to write a generally accepted history of the period in question.**

*I think that religious communities should become part of the grassroots movement that RECOM should become. I don't agree that RECOM should only be a commission. It has to be a much broader approach which will serve as an encouragement to believers, provide an opportunity to pass their knowledge to other people, and help them to collect the facts. However, it is very important to understand what churches and religious communities expect from RECOM. RECOM should not try to define the character of the war, to articulate it in any way; it should simply collect the facts and information which will be used by future generations, historians, and all those who are going to be involved in writing an acceptable historical account of those events. When I say this, I mean the entire region. RECOM needs to make a significant database which will be relevant for the historians.* (Boris Kožemjakin, Jewish Community in BiH, Regional Consultation on the Initiative for RECOM with Representatives of Religious Communities and Churches, Sarajevo, BiH, November 4, 2010).

**Believers need to develop an emotional approach to others and nurture the type of atmosphere which will allow a life together.**

*We, as priests, as shepherds, must create a climate in which the mentioning of war crimes and the opening of mass graves will not be understood as a call to revenge ... People need to know all the things that happened, but that should bring them closer together, make them forgive each other, and help them to continue living next to each other.* (Danilo Pavlović, Priest from the Žitomislići Monastery, BiH, Regional Consultation on the Initiative for RECOM with Representatives of Religious Communities and Churches, Sarajevo, BiH, November 4, 2010).

**Pledging our support to the work of RECOM does not mean that we have given any kind of authorization.**

*If we pledged our support to RECOM it does not mean that we gave it the power of attorney. I will make a report from this consultation and submit it to the church for their opinion. I don't think that any authorizations will be given.* (Boško Tošović, Dabro-Bosanska Archbishopry, BiH, Regional Consultation on the Initiative for RECOM with Representatives of Religious Communities and Churches, Sarajevo, BiH, November 4, 2010).

**It is absolutely indispensable that we now reach a minimum of truth we can agree on.**

*A minimum of truth we can all agree on must be reached now so that we can carry on this process throughout the region. So, the need is clear and we must get down to work... I think that everybody can see clearly now that we must reach a consensus on at least one segment of truth to be able to continue living like normal people. And I think that there is enough positive energy to accomplish it.* (Prof. Dr. Fra. Ivo Marković, Interreligious Service "Face to Face," BiH, Regional Consultation on the Initiative for RECOM with Representatives of Religious Communities and Churches, Sarajevo, BiH, November 4, 2010).

**Our most important potential is in creating a good climate for the commission among the believers.**

*I think that we have forgotten that we are believers, too, and that we can help create a positive climate for this commission among the believers. (Jakob Pfeifer, Priest in Odžaci, Serbia, Regional Consultation on the Initiative for RECOM with Representatives of Religious Communities and Churches, Sarajevo, BiH, November 4, 2010).*

**We should support RECOM by prayer.**

*At the previous consultation in Belgrade I suggested we supported RECOM by a prayer for the victims. Now I would like to add that we should also pray for those who committed the crimes, too. (Marijana Ajzenkol, Interreligious Center, Belgrade, Serbia, Regional Consultation on the Initiative for RECOM with Representatives of Religious Communities and Churches, Sarajevo, BiH, November 4, 2010).*

**Elements for reconciliation will be built into educational programs through religion classes in school.**

*We need a lot of positive inner energy which can be built into educational programs with the purpose of achieving reconciliation. We conducted several opinion polls about tolerance and non-violence and the results are extremely bad. We need to use the facts collected by RECOM to educate future generations and to teach them tolerance and reconciliation. (Marko Antić Brkić, Interreligious Institute of BiH, Regional Consultation on the Initiative for RECOM with Representatives of Religious Communities and Churches, Sarajevo, BiH, November 4, 2010).*

*I think that the role of religion teachers (Sunday school teachers, religion instructors, etc.) is very important because we don't want a student to ask his teacher who the Baptist are and receive an answer that they are a sect not worth mentioning. They should be able to educate students about different religions instead of creating confusion and spreading intolerance. Religion instructors should have frequent seminars and consultations with their colleagues from other religious communities because what they teach students is very important – the students should be able to know major holidays observed by other religions and what meaning they have. They should understand that their holidays are equally as worth as ours. Regretfully, I am not sure that all of our religion instructors are educated in the right manner. The same applies to school religion and history textbooks... (Živica Tucić, Religious Analyst, Religious Information Agency, Belgrade, Serbia, Regional Consultation on the Initiative for RECOM with Representatives of Religious Communities and Churches, Sarajevo, BiH, November 4, 2010).*