

Consultations with female victims of war for the establishment of RECOM

Rahovec/Orahovac

Kosovo 4. December 2010.

The Center for Research, Documentation and Publication (CRDP) from Kosovo, a member of the Coalition for RECOM, conducted its first local consultations on the RECOM initiative (for the establishment of a Fact Finding Regional Commission related to war crimes and other human rights violations committed within the period of 1991- 2001 in the territory of former Yugoslavia), with female war victims, on December 4, 2010 in Rahovec/Orahovac. Thirty-two women participated in these consultations. They were from the ethnic Albanian, Kosovo Serb and Roma communities from the villages of Hoqa e Madhe/Velika Hocha and Krusha e Madhe/Velika Kruša.

A large number of the media did not respond to the invitation to attend because of the parliamentary elections that were due to be held at the time in Kosovo. However, a Journalist from 'Lajm', a daily newspaper, was present and wrote a good article on the consultations and the RECOM initiative.

Participation of female relatives of the victims from the municipality of Rahovec.

During the presentation of the RECOM initiative, members of the panel and the moderator tried to explain RECOM's concept given the relatively low level of education of the women. Moreover, the women still suffer from the consequences of their losses and needed to talk more than to listen. They spoke directly about their suffering, about how they were facing the past, and how to find the perpetrators of the crimes as well as just how to continue in the coming days. They gave very clear answers to questions such as: How would you react if you faced the killer/perpetrator of your husband/brother? Would you face the killer/perpetrator? Would you pardon the killer/perpetrator? Do you believe in the justice system? Would you like to know who committed the crimes? Would you like to know where the mass graves are?

Discussions lasted for some time because the women felt a need to speak about their history, their suffering and they demanded that perpetrators should be found and the whereabouts of missing persons to be established.

In the course of discussions, the women expressed their need to share their experiences of the events from the period 1998 - 1999. They insisted that war criminals should be caught. When members of the panel asked direct questions about how would they would react if the perpetrators of crime were established, reactions were different. Svetlana Velikić demanded that the criminals who abducted her brother in 1999 to should be prosecuted. However, some women gave evidence of Serbian police who saved several Albanian individuals during the war in Rahovec/Orahovac.

At the end of the meeting, the 27 female victims, present for these discussions, signed a statement for participation attesting to their participation in the RECOM Coalition and expressed their willingness to participate in other similar meetings, either nationally or regionally, and in any search for the truth for war crime victims.

Review of proposals, thoughts and recommendations

Truth should be known regardless of ethnicity

The truth should be established. What happened happened. It happened in 1999 for us and for the Serbian side. Regardless of that, we should sit again around the table and identify our problems and the persons who we really miss every single day... What hurts me is that 12 years after the war we still want the people to be identified and their grave sites to be known. Let us leave compensation to one side because money means nothing for a dead human being. It would be a big help to us if our children knew the whereabouts of their fathers, mothers or their relatives. This would be as an appeal for the municipality as well. (Fahrije Hoti, Association Mothers from Krusha e Madhe/Velika Kruša, Krusha e Madhe/Velika Kruša. Local consultations with female victims of war, Rahovec/Orahovac, Kosovo, 4 December 2010)

Truth for the sake of future generations

Nobody can ever return the people who have gone missing. They do not exist today, not even in the past, but we should at least deal with the accusations, or the future generations will accuse

us. (Shukrije Gashi, *Partners Kosova, Prishtinë/Priština*. Local consultations with female victims of war, Rahovec/Orahovac, Kosovo, 4 December 2010).

Financial reparations are not important, I want to know the whereabouts of the remains of the missing

... it will be 12 years now, in March. I want to know and to find him, to know where he is, to bury him in his grave, nothing else is important to me, I only want to know where he is because after 12 years I do not know anything about him... (Stana Todić, victim family member, Hoqa e Madhe/Velika Hoča. Local consultations with female victims of war, Rahovec/Orahovac, Kosovo, 4 December 2010).

Mutual communication would help the establishment of a commission to find the truth for both sides

However, to establish a commission, we must have eyewitnesses who really testify the truth, both from our side and their side. Then we could solve this problem and search for war crime cases relating to both the missing and of those killed. Therefore, as long as we have no communication between ourselves, we won't find those who have really committed crimes and both from the Albanian and from the Serbian side, we will never find missing persons or missing victims. (Fahrije Hoti, Association of Mothers from Krusha e Madhe/Velika Kruša, Krusha e Madhe/Velika Kruša. Local consultations with female victims of war, Rahovec/Orahovac, Kosovo, 4 December 2010).

... Witnesses who know of those who have worked, have killed people, have participated in the missing of persons and who have exact information, not fictitious information, in cooperation with the commission that will be established, can help search and solve those problems, can shed light on the fate of the missing persons, can establish the war crimes. Otherwise, this is how we make ourselves busy with conferences and for the period of 12 years, that I have been dealing with missing persons' conferences, we have had no results. (Fahrije Hoti, Association Mothers from Krusha e Madhe/Velika Kruša, Krusha e Madhe/Velika Kruša. Local consultations with female victims of war, Rahovec/Orahovac, Kosovo, 4 December 2010).

There is no forgiveness for crime!

...He will never deserve forgiveness. It is never possible to forgive Nenad, because I know, they were my father's neighbors, we went out together. He was a friend of my brother-in-law and so he destroyed our family, there will never be a pardon for him. He should pay for the crime that he has committed, to the whole of Rahovec/Orahovac... (Xhemile Sylka, victim family member, Rahovec/Orahovac. Local consultations with female victims of war, Rahovec/Orahovac, Kosovo, 4 December 2010).

RECOM should be formed because (we need) a register of all victims, of the killed and of those who have gone missing and which will stop the manipulation of the data.

Why the RECOM Commission? Because a range of cases has been raised so far, information has been distributed, but if all that is not officially stated in a structural way, then there always seems to be a tendency to change them, to give them another shape, to increase, to falsify. Therefore, the creation of a commission is needed to deal with proving and confirming cases. Also, due to the fact that the war occurred all over Yugoslavia, there are similarities everywhere. Apart from that, perpetrators of these criminal acts often were the same people, and this is precisely the reason why RECOM - a regional commission should be created, so that family members of missing persons, of the victims, of war veterans, all the groups that have been attacked the most can come to the commission and testify about war crimes. Why RECOM? ... also for the reason that it will compile a register of all the victims and the missing persons, so that once and for all manipulation (of the truth) can be stopped. As one of the participants mentioned before, she told us that she sometimes receives information that her husband and son are somewhere and that she hopes for their return some day. (Shukrije Gashi, Partners Kosova, Prishtinë/Priština. Local consultations with female victims of war, Rahovec/Orahovac, Kosovo, 4 December 2010).

There's no room for forgiveness!

I hope God returned it to him[the pain and suffering], his parents and sisters should feel like I have felt'... 'I only wish he told us the reason why they killed him, why was he killed. He was married, he had a daughter three months after that. He did not see his first child. He was thirty-six. It is difficult for everyone, everybody cries over their own... (Vesna Manitašević, Women's Association Jefimija, Hoqa e Madhe/ Velika Hoča, Local consultations with female victims of war, Rahovec/Orahovac, Kosovo, 4 December 2010).

If someone came and told you “I know who killed your father” would you pardon the perpetrator?

... Never! ...He should get what he deserves, he should be punished. (Brankica Milić, victims' family member, Velika Hoča/Hoqa e Madhe. Local consultations with female victims of war, Rahovec/Orahovac, Kosovo, 4 December 2010).

Every victim and every perpetrator has a name and a surname

... Every victim has a name and a surname, and that should be same for every perpetrator - to have a name and a surname, and not the name of the whole community... The perpetrator is not known yet, I wish I knew him or her. All I am interested in is the reason why my father was killed. (Tatjana Kolašinac, victim's family member, Rahovec/Orahovac. Local consultations with female victims of war, Rahovec/Orahovac, Kosovo, 4 December 2010).

Would you like to face that killer?

I am also only interested in ... I know that nothing can return him. My mother died with that wish but I would only like to know why... No. He should be put on trial, I would not like to face him at all...I have said thousands of times, If they had killed him there, in front of us, we would know whom we buried, but like this, we still wonder if it is really him. ...but you know, you cannot give up ... I would not be able to face him. No! Simply, only the law should finish the job for such people. Nothing can bring back my brother... I wish I knew who he was and that he had been punished, based on law, of course. I would never be able to judge anyone or to do anything like that. (Svetlana Velikić, victim's family member, Rahovec/Orahovac. Local consultations with female victims of war, Rahovec/Orahovac, Kosovo, 4 December 2010).

Communication and exchange of information should be mutual

Now, please, I ask of all the Serbs who are present here, that we take further steps for your people, but you should also take steps for our people. Let those who have gone missing appear and let us know where their mortal remains are, because it is enough. Almost twelve years have passed. Children have been waiting, young wives have been waiting for their remains to appear, because we know what has happened. But, please, if you have information share it with us, here where we have gathered. And also, we for your people. If we know anything we will share information, but if you know anything, share the information with us because enough is enough.

Twelve years have passed, it is not easy for a mother to raise seven children (alone). (Miradije Ramadani, victim's family member, Krusha e Madhe/Velika Kruša. Local consultations with female victims of war, Rahovec/Orahovac, Kosovo, 4 December 2010).

I would take my revenge on the criminals

... Let me talk to the lady Miradije. How would you feel if it was revealed that a criminal who has killed your husband has been unmasked? Would you forgive or punish him? For example, I would neither forgive nor punish him. If I was given an opportunity, I would take my revenge on him. I would not leave him alive, just like the father of my children who is not alive any longer. (Fahrije Hoti, Association of Mothers from Krusha e Madhe/Velika Kruša, Krusha e Madhe/Velika Kruša. Local consultations with female victims of war, Rahovec/Orahovac, Kosovo, 4 December 2010).

No forgiveness

On the next 21-st, twelve years and 5 moths. Last time... now I know nothing about him... (Sheribane Ukshini, victims' family member, Rahovec/Orahovac, Local consultations with female victims of war, Rahovec/Orahovac, Kosovo, 4 December 2010).

But personally, I will never forgive him. He should forget all thoughts that I will ever forgive him because when my husband was killed he was only thirty-three years old... Yes, yes, he should be put into prison for life. (Bademe Duraku, victims' family member, Krusha e Madhe/Velika Kruša. Local consultations with female victims of war, Rahovec/Orahovac, Kosovo, 4 December 2010).

... I just wanted to give a short answer to Bademe. It has been mentioned that Boško has committed war crimes. As an NGO, as a village council, we have contacted him, we have met him, he is completely innocent [although] as we were not witnesses we couldn't testify to that. (Fahrije Hoti, Association Mothers from Krusha e Madhe/Velika Kruša, Krusha e Madhe/Velika Kruša. Local consultations with female victims of war, Rahovec/Orahovac, Kosovo, 4 December 2010).