

## **Local consultation with representatives of associations of former detention camp inmates and victims' family members on the RECOM Initiative**

Međugorje, Bosnia and Herzegovina

December 11, 2010

A local consultation with representatives of associations of former detention camp inmates and victims' family members on the Initiative for RECOM and the Draft RECOM Statute was organized by the Association of Former Detention Camp Inmates of the Homeland War and the BiH Journalists' Association. The consultation was attended by 20 participants: former detention camp inmates, human rights activists, politicians, journalists, members of non-governmental organizations, and members of the Coalition for RECOM. Introductory speeches were given by Mirko Zelenika (president of the Association of Former Detention Camp Inmates of the Homeland War in BiH), Ivo Jerkić (Chief-of-Staff of the Čitluk Municipality, BiH), Anđelko Kvesić (Busovača Association of Former Detention Camp Inmates, BiH), and Milena Savić (National Coordinator for the consultation process in BiH).

### **Opinions, Suggestions, and Recommendations of the Participants**

**It will be impossible to create RECOM while some members of the Bosnian government are the same people who were behind the war and the repressive state apparatus in the 1990s. It is humiliating for the victims.**

*I think that this Initiative proceed more slowly. You should work on improving the Statute and so on. When I say this, I am exclusively thinking of the Parliament of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Parliament should (first) adopt a resolution, a declaration, give an opinion or make a statement that the armed conflict took place and that there were camps. The most important thing for Parliament to do is to name those people who are serving as members of the executive branch of the government and who are suspected to have committed wrongdoings. Parliament should call upon them to resign from their government positions... So, it is impossible to go any further with this until this is done. We cannot allow those who were behind the whole war and repression machinery to be participants in this initiative. They built the camps, took people to an unknown fate, and now we are discussing RECOM while they are still sitting in their offices. That is truly humiliating for the victims... not to mention the number of missing persons, which is an indisputable fact. What is also undeniable is the fact that if you pay, you can learn where the*

bodies are. The sad thing is that the competent state organs aren't doing anything about it... there are still no records on former detention camp inmates on any level – not in our local communities, in the municipality, the town assembly, in the county, in the entity, or at a state level. And the reason we are in this situation is that no one wants to deal with it. That's where the government should step in, that's a job for the government. Without it, this whole initiative makes no sense. We can't expect the Bosniaks or the Croats to establish the facts about crimes until individuals from my own nation decide to speak. We have to accept the fact that we are going to be frowned upon and criticized. I did, 15 years ago, and now I'm at peace being here with you. (Mirko Zelenika, President of the Association of Former Detention Camp Inmates of the Homeland War in BiH. Local consultation with representatives of associations of former detention camp inmates and victims' family members on the RECOM Initiative, Međugorje, Bosnia and Herzegovina, December 11, 2010).

**Bosnia and Herzegovina should provide three or six members of the Commission so that each nation has an equal vote.**

*I would like to say something about Article 22 of the Draft RECOM Statute, with respect to the proposal to elect five members from Bosnia and Herzegovina onto the Commission. Did you intend to elect two Bosniaks, two Serbs, and one Croat? When I think about Croatia and Serbia, I even think that they can elect one member instead of three, but for Bosnia and Herzegovina I don't think that's the right number. I would like to hear some opinions on this... So the idea is to choose three or six members so that every nation has an equal vote. (Josip Drežnjak, Association of the Families of the Missing from Grabovica, BiH. Local consultation with representatives of associations of former detention camp inmates and victims' family members on the RECOM Initiative, Međugorje, Bosnia and Herzegovina, December 11, 2010).*

**Only a debate on the facts can lead us to a better quality life.**

*I want to see that there is an equal number of members from each nation in the commission, and because RECOM will not elect its members – the executive branch of government will do it for RECOM – this kind of arrangement is a sure way to establish the truth. Whether it going to be Option A or Option B depends on the agreements people reach. But, the fact is that without the truth, without a debate we can't do a thing... We need (to do) everything that can help us*

*make a record of everything that happened, to record every fact – that can help us make a better life for ourselves. (Anđelko Kvesić, Busovača Association of Former Detention Camp Inmates, BiH. Local consultation with representatives of associations of former detention camp inmates and victims' family members on the RECOM Initiative, Međugorje, Bosnia and Herzegovina, December 11, 2010).*

**It is necessary to adopt a law prohibiting the denial of war crimes and the existence of detention camps. Witnesses need to be well prepared for testifying.**

*We can't just let people say that there were no detention camps... when we are talking about laws, it is necessary to adopt a law prohibiting the denial of war crimes in public... If a detention camp was registered by the Committee of the International Red Cross and if individuals have been sentenced for running such detention camps, no one should be allowed to publicly deny their existence... We need to make a proposal for the Parliament of Bosnia and Herzegovina showing how to draft a law prohibiting the denial of any detention camp.*

*...I am a witness for 21 missing persons from Bogojane. But, when you appear before a public prosecutor 17 years after the crime, you can't even remember what happened three months ago, let alone almost two decades alone. For that reason, I don't think very highly of the court, it looks like a circus to me. You sit there, people record your testimony, they ask you questions and you lose it... Witnesses must be very well prepared for their testimonies. That is extremely important. Also, there are already descriptions of events during which people suffered disabilities. Those descriptions and lists exist for military personal and for the civilian victims or war, too. So, those lists already exist. (Željko Vladić, Association of Former Detention Camp Inmates, Mostar, BiH. Local consultation with representatives of associations of former detention camp inmates and victims' family members on the RECOM Initiative, Međugorje, Bosnia and Herzegovina, December 11, 2010).*

**A meeting should be convened between members of the Coalition for RECOM and former detention camp inmates so that a list can be made of all former inmates.**

*I think that the Bosniak side already has a list of all detention locations. We should organize a meeting between representatives of the Coalition for RECOM and those who were in detention camps of the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina, who were in detention camps of the Croatian Defence Council, those who were in Serbian detention camps. Let's get together and, although not all of us will accept the invitation, there will be a lot of people willing to start [to make a list of all former detention camp inmates]. (Zlatko Prkić, Association of Prisoners, Vareš, BiH. Local*

consultation with representatives of associations of former detention camp inmates and victims' family members on the RECOM Initiative, Međugorje, Bosnia and Herzegovina, December 11, 2010).

**RECOM must be strong and expand its activity, giving its opinion on which individuals responsible for wrongdoings are still holding public office.**

RECOM must be strong within because there are going to be three nations, represented by members of the Presidency, who have a vote – they are able to offer a negative opinion on those politicians (responsible for wrongdoings). We need to exert as much pressure as we possibly can through the media, through political parties and so on, so that those individuals are no longer elected to important government positions. The same applies to people denying various forms of suffering caused by the war as well as the existence of detention camps... RECOM must expand its activity to give their opinion on individuals who committed wrongdoings in the past war. If RECOM declares itself competent to do it, the success of the Commission will be directly proportional to their willingness to point a finger at those individuals. (*Gordan Zeljko, County Chapter of the HDZ, Mostar, BiH. Local consultation with representatives of associations of former detention camp inmates and victims' family members on the RECOM Initiative, Međugorje, Bosnia and Herzegovina, December 11, 2010*).

**Former detention camp inmates from all sides should get together and discuss their needs.**

*I support the initiative to organize meetings for former detention camp inmates, from all sides, in the armed conflict in municipalities where they were imprisoned. So, all those who were held captive on the territory of the Mostar municipality, regardless of the nation they belong to, should get together and exchange their stories. Prisoners from Vareš should meet with other prisoners from Vareš, from all three sides in the conflict, and so on. (Željko Zovko, Association of former detention camp inmates, Mostar, BiH. Local consultation with representatives of associations of former detention camp inmates and victims' family members on the RECOM Initiative, Međugorje, Bosnia and Herzegovina, December 11, 2010).*

**Each prospective member of RECOM should first obtain endorsement from associations of victims.**

*... The Statute of RECOM should stipulate the method for the appointment of RECOM members in a way that will enable associations of victims to black-ball potential members of the*

*Commission. (Davor Pehar, Town of Mostar Chapter of the HDZ. Local consultation with representatives of associations of former detention camp inmates and victims' family members on the RECOM initiative, Međugorje, Bosnia and Herzegovina, December 11, 2010).*

**Associations of victims from BiH should have their own representative in the Coordination Council of the Coalition for RECOM.**

*No one is claiming that the Coalition for RECOM can create miracles. But, if the commission is able to disclose 10 or 15% of all those war crimes and human rights violations committed during the war, we can say that the Commission was successful. It is considered a success to bring only one perpetrator to justice. I think that all associations will agree that in addition to Anđelko Kvesić, we should have another representative from Bosnia and Herzegovina on the Coordination Council of the Coalition for RECOM. That can be changed at the first Assembly and I hope that it should not be a problem for Mrs. Nataša Kandić or the Humanitarian Law Center for us to have another qualified man to represent us. It does not matter what organizational pattern we are going to adopt, it is important that everyone tells the truth. (Radmilo Golijanin, The League for the protection of private property and human rights, Trebinje, BiH. Local consultation with representatives of associations of former detention camp inmates and victims' family members on the RECOM Initiative, Međugorje, Bosnia and Herzegovina, December 11, 2010).*