



# REPORT

## Conference „Empower Women Now!

Creating a culture of recognition and

reconciliation in Kosovo”

11-12 May 2017 in Gjakova, Kosovo

October 2017



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## 1. Short Summary

To the international conference: **“Empower Women Now! Creating a culture of recognition and reconciliation in Kosovo”** on 10 – 12 of May 2017 Medica Gjakova and Medica Mondiale welcomed around 150 participants in Gjakova to accelerate the process of implementing the pension scheme and reparation for survivors of sexual violence during the Kosovo war.

Mirlinda Sada, Executive Director of Medica Gjakova and Dr. Monika Hauser summarize the conference with the following words:

„We can proudly say that the conference marked an important step in furthering regional cooperation by bringing together around **150 participants from Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia**, representatives of NGOs and Foundations as well as representatives of the Government of Kosovo, diplomatic corps and donors. Foremost it brought nearly 50 clients of Medica Gjakova to the discussion table.

As our aim was to **empower survivors of sexual violence** and have their voices heard, we can share that their active participation at the conference made them feel proud and empowered for sharing their stories. As said by them, after the conference they felt being supported by the Government and society. One client of Medica Gjakova said: “Come on, throw your wet handkerchief away. We have nothing to cry anymore, nobody is blaming us now.” It was a pleasure to listen to national and international experts sharing their views and commitment to address the needs and rights of survivors of sexual violence, especially the planned pension scheme in Kosovo.

The conference provided a **unique opportunity** for key actors from the region to **share their knowledge and experiences**, and identify best practices that could serve any society that is touched by this war crime. We highly believe in the importance of strengthening these types of exchanges and cooperation across borders in the Western Balkans.

Last but not least, the **presence of key actors of the Government of Kosovo**, the former President of Kosovo, the Mayor of the city of Gjakova, and the Minister of Labour and Social Welfare, were an **important sign of recognition** for the survivors of sexual violence that their suffering is finally being recognized and action being taken.

We express our commitment to press for the **implementation of the planned pension scheme** in Kosovo with no further delays, to **raise awareness in Kosovo society and institutions** and to continue our work in **empowering survivors of sexual violence** in Kosovo.

Now it is up to all of us to make the change, to cooperate towards integrating survivors of sexual violence in Kosovo. We all can do our share now, for **creating a culture of recognition and reconciliation and for the future of Kosovo!** “

This conference was organized by Medica Gjakova in cooperation with *medica mondiale*, under the auspices of the Austrian Embassy, financially supported by the Austrian Development Agency, giz, *medica mondiale*, the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, and the Municipality of Gjakova.

## 2. Conference Programm

Thursday, 11 May 2017

- 08:00 – 09:30** Registration, getting together in the hotel lobby
- 09:30 – 10:20** Opening by Jeta Krasniqi (moderator)  
Opening words by Atifete Jahjaga (Former President of Kosovo), Mimoza Kusari-Lila (Mayor of Gjakova), Gernot Pfandler (Ambassador of Austria), Christina Gehlsen (Deputy Ambassador of Germany), Monika Hauser (Executive Board Member of *medica mondiale*), Mirlinda Sada (Director of Medica Gjakova)
- 10:25 – 10:45** Story of a survivor of sexualized violence during the 1998/1999 war in Kosovo
- 10:50 – 11:20** Coffee break
- 11:20 – 11:40** Overview on the 1998/1999 war in Kosovo with particular focus on the situation and effects on women and the efforts and achievements of the women's movement  
By Igballe Rogova (Executive Director, Kosova Women's Network)
- 11:40 – 12:00** Wartime sexual violence in Kosovo and the planned reparation scheme  
By Arban Abrashi (Minister of Labour and Social Welfare)
- 12:00 – 12:30** Q & A / discussion
- 12:30 – 13:30** **Lunch break**
- 13:30 – 13:45** Afternoon opening  
Opening word by Tom Adams (Deputy Ambassador of the United Kingdom)
- 13:45 – 14:00** Relationship of the local community toward women victims of rape  
By Nataša Kandić (Founder Humanitarian Law Centre, Serbia)
- 14:00 – 15:45** PARTICIPATORY SESSION I: Addressing specific questions of the pension scheme  
*World Café* – Guiding questions:
- How to ensure access to a trauma-sensitive and transformative pension scheme?
  - What are incentives and obstacles to apply for the pension?
  - How can we help to create a commemorative culture in Kosovo?
  - How should the pension scheme be announced & communicated in Kosovo?
- 15:45 – 16:15** **Coffee break**
- 16:15 – 16:45** Reconciliation and dealing with the past from a feminist perspective  
By Marijana Senjak (Former president of Croatian Commission for victims of sexual violence in war)
- 16:45 – 17:00** Closing

**Friday, 12 May 2017**

**09:00–09:10** Opening

**09:15–09:45** Documentary from Kosovo (Voices from the Hell)

**09:45–10:15** On the Access to Justice Strategy of Kosovo

By Dhurata Hoxha (Minister of Justice)

**10:15–10:45** Coffee break

**10:45–11:15** Support to survivors of sexual violence in Kosovo: Practical experiences and lessons learnt from the field

Mirlinda Sada (Director, Medica Gjakova)

**11:15–12:00** On the situation of survivors of sexual violence during the war: Moving beyond victimization of SGBV survivors toward their (self-) empowerment

By Monika Hauser (Executive Board member, *medica mondiale*)

**12:00–13:00** Lunch break

**13:00–13:30** Consequences of war-related sexualized violence: Key results of a study conducted in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH)

By Vera Haag Arbenz (Programme manager, *medica mondiale*) and  
Lejla Heremić (Project coordinator, Medica Zenica)

**13:30–15:00** PARTICIPATORY SESSION II: Sharing regional experiences and lessons learned  
*Fish bowl discussion:*

Feride Rushiti (Executive Director, Kosova Rehabilitation Centre for Torture Victims)

Sabiha Husić (Director, Medica Zenica, Bosnia and Herzegovina)

Nela Pamuković (Co-founder, Centre for Women War Victims, Croatia)

- What are the key experiences with implementing a pension scheme in BiH and Croatia for survivors of sexual violence?
- What were / are achievement & obstacles along the implementation?
- What are the key recommendations for Kosovo?

**15:00–15:30** Coffee break

**15:30–16:00** National Action Plan on the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 in Kosovo: How much is being achieved?

Edi Gusia (Head, Gender Agency Kosovo).

### 3. Opening Words

In the opening words, the speakers gave an overview on the 1998/1999 war in Kosovo with particular focus on the situation and effects on women and the efforts and achievements of the women's movement, the state of implementation of the law on the "Status of Rights of Martyrs, Invalids, Veterans, Members of KLA, Civilian Victims of War and their families" and the next steps, that need to be done to achieve a culture of recognition and reconciliation in Kosovo.

#### Jeta Krasniqi:



More than 20.000 women are affected by conflict-related sexualized violence in Kosovo. For a long time this consequence of war was kept in silence, leaving the survivors without any institutional treatment, the only open door were non-governmental organizations.

With the establishment of the National Council of survivors of sexual violence during the war in 2014, the institutional discourse of social treatment of this issue was changed.

Today, survivors are protected by law, but there remains a lot to be done in order to guarantee the implementation of the law that grants their legal right for a pension, for access to justice, access to health services and to ensure all benefits foreseen by law.

Consequences of sexual violence are grave, not only for the victim, they affect whole families and pass on from generation to generation. The culture of impunity of this war crime remains high to this date. Therefore, we need to address conflict-related sexual violence, and the stigma surrounding it, as it remains high in society.

#### Monica Hauser:



***„There is no hiding, the hiding time is over and we are all responsible that this change can happen at the local and international level.“***

„We are delighted to hold this conference at this very important point of time in Kosovo. Kosovo already went a long way since the end of the war until today. Tireless and big efforts were made on the part of the women's movement and by President Jahjaga through the establishment of the National Council. However, there is still a lot of work ahead. Our holistic and trauma-sensitive approach to clients, that combines gynaecological care, psychosocial counselling, legal advice,

income generating activities and advocacy, is still needed nowadays. From the beginning, our attitude was based on strong feelings of solidarity with clients and to interact with respect.



### **Mirlinda Sada:**

***„We are ready to push together for concrete steps in recognizing survivors of conflict-related violence.“***

„Women in Kosovo still suffer from the consequences of war, especially the survivors of sexual violence, who are still dealing with the healing of their trauma, and with healing their body and soul. Our clients are discriminated by society, and even sometimes by their families and have problems to reintegrate into society. Changes for good have started but still we need a lot of work for strengthening and commitment to cooperation between institutions and survivors of violence.“

### **Atifete Jahjaga:**

***„Protecting the identity of victims of sexual violence is the indispensable and indisputable prerequisite in this process. It is up to the victims themselves and nobody else to decide whether or not they want their identity to be known to others.“*** (Atifete Jahjaga)

The former president of Kosovo focuses on the application process and for the status of victims of sexual violence during the war in Kosovo. She explains that there will be time for five years to apply for the pension. She expected from the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare a clear information campaign that will serve victims of sexual violence to know how they can apply without hesitation in discovering their identity.



***“The conference mentions it is to create a culture of recognition, acknowledging what has happened, offering assistance to the victims but not stigmatizing them. The one to blame is always the perpetrator and not the victim.”*** (Gernot Pfandler)

## Mimoza Kusari Lila:

The mayor of Gjakova explained that Gjakova was one of the most affected municipalities during the war in many respects, and with regard to sexualized war violence, it dominates with the number of victims and survivors of sexual violence.

Mrs. Kusari-Lila described the „essence of social inequity in Kosovo“. Advocacy and lobbying and help and to institutionalize was done for all categories emerging from war, except for two, namely the victims of sexual violence during the war and the mothers of the missing, whose status and benefits even today are not regulated by law.

## Gernot Pfandler and Christina Gehlsen:

The ambassadors of Austria and Germany pointed out the importance of the UN Security Council Resolution 1325, which specifically provides the right of protection of women and girls in armed conflicts.

Mrs. Gehlsen additionally thanked Medica Gjakova and *medica mondiale* for contributing greatly to breaking taboos of sexual violence in conflict. For this, in her opinion “medica” is a true champion of women's rights and survivors of sexual violence

## Nderime Sahatqija with a client of Medica Gjakova:

For a very long time, survivors of sexual violence kept silent. There had been a lot of shame and stigma after the war, which considered survivors of sexual violence were guilty and shame for their families. Some survivors felt this contempt for many years. As a consequence of being excluded from society and family, the physical and mental health status often deteriorated, and also self-esteem.

This is also the story of many clients of Medica Gjakova. It is a success that one client of Medica Gjakova broke the silence by writing a poem, which was read publicly at the conference by her psychosocial counsellor, Nderime Sahatqija.

She found her strength with the support of Medica Gjakova, her boys and in the exchange with other survivors.

*“I am crying for you  
You are crying for me  
Because this terrible things we never can  
forget  
As this is our fate  
Oh terrible fate  
I asked myself why to me  
And why to You?  
Well my friend don't worry  
Because we have lots of friends with the  
same pain  
Friends like me and you  
But they don't dare talk“*

(excerpt from the poem “To my friend”,  
by a survivor)

## Igballe Rogova:

As Executive Director of the Kosovo Women's Network, she gave a brief overview on the women's movement in Kosovo and their difficulties and achievements on the way to legal protection and justice for survivors of sexual violence. She mentioned a joint protest of survivors and activists on 8 of March 2012, when women went out in the streets with the motto "We don't want flowers, we want legal protection and justice" and ended with an appeal to the media and institutions to be very sensitive and persistent with their important roles in order to contribute to the process of recognizing what happened, and not to stop it.

Mrs. Rogova stressed that it was a long process but this gave the possibility to create mechanisms carefully with the knowledge of colleagues from Bosnia and Herzegovina, who came and shared their experience to avoid a repetition of the same mistakes.



## Arban Abrashi:

The Minister of Labour and Social Welfare summarized the challenges of the commission and expressed the aim to train members of the commission and the Secretariat to enable a trauma-sensitive application process for the pension.

The second important issue he mentions were finances. The amount of the monthly pension has to be considered carefully, taking into consideration other pension schemes. He assured that the budget is allocated.

***„As long as I'm there, we will put the process on a safe track that nobody can stop.“  
(Arban Abrashi)***

### **Tomas Adams:**

After highlighting the important step of establishing a commission for recognizing and verifying the status of raped persons during the Kosovo Liberation War, the Deputy Ambassador of the United Kingdom focused on the future. For a true implementation and support for survivors, he encouraged all attendees of the conference, including the Government of Kosovo, to help changing behaviour in this country, to support survivors, to understand that they should not be blamed and to ensure that society and institutions have to hold responsible perpetrators of these crimes.

### **Marijana Senjak:**

**“A feminist approach to justice is much wider than the law provides. Apart from the punishment of the perpetrator, it also means recognizing the pain and harm caused, compensating and healing the survivors.”**

The former president of the Croatian commission for victims of sexual violence during the war talked about reconciliation and coping with the past from the feminist perspective.

She presented the Women Court, which took place in May 2015 in Sarajevo and explained the role of reparations as one mechanism within the concept of transitional justice as response to grave, massive and systematic human rights violations.



### **Nataša Kandić:**

The founder of the Humanitarian Law Centre in Serbia focused on a brief explanation of the relationship between the local community, the family and the wider community in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo. Her conclusions could be summarised in two main points. Firstly, the importance of preserving the identity of survivors. Secondly, the need and possibility of every woman or girl to talk about what has happened, to show how it felt and how strong the fear was of returning to society.

## 4. Results of Working Groups

In four working groups, the following specific questions on the pension scheme were discussed and recommendations worked out:

### 1.) How to ensure access to a trauma-sensitive and transformative pension scheme?

- ✓ Awareness raising campaign on the pension scheme and conflict-related sexual violence on TV and through direct interaction with families and the community;
- ✓ support and psychosocial counselling through NGOs;
- ✓ possibilities to consult with psychologists;
- ✓ maintain confidentiality in order not to re-traumatize survivors;
- ✓ and possibly data encryption.



### 2.) How should the pension scheme be announced and communicated in Kosovo?

- ✓ Education of media and officials in relevant institutions at the central and local level;
- ✓ close cooperation with civil society (and NGOs) in drafting campaigns;
- ✓ special access to different groups (women who have confessed and those not yet);
- ✓ telephone line (24/7) where anonymity is protected;
- ✓ cooperation with media and broadcasting companies;
- ✓ exploitation of existing mechanisms, such as the Domestic Violence Departments (local and central level);
- ✓ survey with survivors on their assessments and needs when interacting with media;
- ✓ involvement of beneficiaries when drafting the campaign.

### 3.) What are incentives and obstacles to apply for the pension?

#### Obstacles:

- ✓ Fear of identification by family members or the community;
- ✓ stigma and prejudices that still exist in the Kosovar mentality;
- ✓ lack of information about rights and mechanisms and how to use them;
- ✓ completion of documentation for application is an obstacle in itself as a long period of time has passed and some, because of the sensitivity of the information, have destroyed the documents while some do not have any documents at all;
- ✓ exemption from other benefits (e.g. widow's pension);
- ✓ maintaining of documentation;
- ✓ fear of justifying the source of the income;
- ✓ lack of family support;
- ✓ lack of evidence;
- ✓ very long waiting time;
- ✓ lack of proper media information about the process and lack of confidentiality.

#### Incentives:

- ✓ Authorization of NGOs to apply on behalf of survivors;
- ✓ the option to choose any bank to receive the pension;
- ✓ the media can play a major role in informing about the steps of how victims can apply;
- ✓ experience exchange in small and confidential information groups;
- ✓ institutional support;
- ✓ involvement of persons who have a certain power in the community;
- ✓ media training;
- ✓ ongoing awareness campaigns.

### 4.) How can we help to create a commemorative culture in Kosovo?

- ✓ Not to forget what happened in Kosovo;
- ✓ educating youth through messages of victims of war in Kosovo;
- ✓ opening commemorative schools and institutional centers;
- ✓ increasing access to treatment for victims of sexual violence;
- ✓ creating memorials, e.g. an institutional date for survivors;
- ✓ handbook of women with their experiences, diaries and copying strategies;
- ✓ introduction of school lessons that would influence younger generations to realize that sexual violence is not a shame but a crime;
- ✓ mechanisms to force the aggressor to seek forgiveness and distance from the crime.

## 5. Regional Exchange

The fight for a culture of recognition and reconciliation is a shared aim of women's movements in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia and Kosovo. In Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as in Croatia, pension schemes as one form of compensation for survivors are already implemented.

One objective of the conference was to share regional experiences and lessons learnt and to strengthen regional cooperation between women's networks.

Therefore, the key results of a study on long-term consequences of Sexual Violence in Bosnia and Herzegovina, conducted by Medica Zenica and *medica mondiale*, was presented by **Vera Haag Arbenz** (Programme Manager for the Western Balkans at *medica mondiale*) and **Lejla Heremić** (Project Coordinator at Medica Zenica).



### Key results of the study:

- ✓ War rape leaves a deep and long-lasting wound on the survivors;
- ✓ War rape not only wounds its survivors, but affects the whole society;
- ✓ transgenerational effects are a challenge;
- ✓ the trauma of war rape survivors is a social, economic and political issue;
- ✓ survivors need direct services and social acknowledgement.

### Recommendations:

- ✓ Access to trauma-sensitive health service is key;
- ✓ access to special education programmes, housing and economic empowerment for women and children is essential;
- ✓ clear information on access to pension and procedures easily understandable is needed;
- ✓ training of commission on verification and documentation to deal with issues of violence and confidentiality must be done at the beginning;
- ✓ support and protection before and during the testimony is crucial;
- ✓ persistent prosecution of perpetrators must continue.



A panel debate with **Sabiha Husić** (Director of Medica Zenica, Bosnia and Herzegovina), **Nela Pamuković** (Center for Women, victims of war, Croatia) and **Feride Rushiti** (Executive Director of the Kosovar Rehabilitation Center for Victims of Torture) took place in which they phrased their recommendations for the implementation process in Kosovo.

#### **Recommendations for Kosovo:**

- ✓ To speed up the process in the implementation of the pension scheme;
- ✓ to establish cooperation between all stakeholders involved in this process, such as NGOs, the Commission on documentation and verification and the competent ministry;
- ✓ to provide long-term psycho-social services all over the country;
- ✓ to have very good and conscious (sensitized) lawyers;
- ✓ to maintain and spread the trauma-sensitive approach of NGOs to other institutions;
- ✓ to enhance regional cooperation and exchange;
- ✓ NGOs should support and empower survivors to apply for the pension.

## 6. Conclusion & Recommendations

Monica Hauser and Mirlinda Sada elaborated on final recommendations. They emphasized the importance of a sensitive approach during the implementation of the law, without revealing the identity of the victims and minimizing the risk of retraumatisation. Other demands and recommendations are:

- ✓ **No further delays in implementing the pension scheme** for survivors of conflict-related sexual violence in Kosovo and a start with its implementation;
- ✓ **access to justice** as the work with the Ministry of Justice has started, but there is no concrete mechanism in place yet;
- ✓ an **awareness raising campaign** for the implementation of the new law and preparation of the campaign with the survivors. The preparation and drafting of this campaign should be done together with survivors;
- ✓ a strategy for **qualification of staff in institutions** in order to avoid stigmatization;
- ✓ **awareness raising for the media** so that they will be allies instead of causing damages;
- ✓ **long-term economic empowerment** for women;
- ✓ **research** on the long-term consequences of sexual violence in Kosovo;
- ✓ **empowerment of the regional network of organizations** working on this field.

## 7. List of Speakers



**Jeta Krasniqi**  
Moderator of the  
conference



**Atifete Jahjaga**  
Former President  
of Kosovo



**Mimoza Kusari-Lila**  
Mayor of the  
municipality of Gjakova



**Gernot Pfandler**  
Ambassador  
of Austria



**Christina Gehlsen**  
Deputy Ambassador  
of Germany



**Monika Hauser**  
Executive Board member  
of *medica mondiale*,  
Germany



**Mirlinda Sada**  
Director of  
Medica Gjakova



**Igballe Rogova**  
Executive Director  
of Kosovo Women's  
Network



**Arban Abrashi**  
Minister of Labour  
and Social Welfare



**Tom Adams**  
Deputy Ambassador  
of the United  
Kingdom



**Nataša Kandić**  
Founder  
Humanitarian Law  
Centre in Serbia



**Marijana Senjak**  
former member of  
Croatian Commission  
for victims of sexual  
violence in war



**Vera Haag Arbenz**  
Program Manager  
Western Balkans,  
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**Lejla Heremić**  
Project Coordinator  
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**Sabiha Husić:**  
Director *Medica*  
Zenica, Bosnia  
and Herzegovina



**Feride Rushiti**  
Executive Director  
of the Kosovar  
Rehabilitation Center  
for Torture Victims



**Nela Pamuković:**  
co-founder  
of the Center  
for Women victims  
of war, Croatia



Conference Organizer Team

The conference was organized by:



Supported by:



Gjakova / Cologne, October 2017