

Zagreb, February 16 2007

Conclusions from International Conference “Establishing the Truth about War Crimes and Conflicts”, Second Regional Forum on Transitional Justice¹

Second Regional Forum on Transitional Justice: “**Establishing the Truth about War Crimes and Conflicts**” organized by regional partners Documenta (Croatia), Humanitarian Law Center (Serbia and Kosovo), and Research and Documentation Center (BiH) was held in Zagreb on February 8 and 9, 2007. More than 300 representatives of victims’ associations, war veterans, refugees, human rights organizations, women groups, and youth initiative groups took part in the discussion and consultations on truth-telling and truth-seeking mechanisms and procedures. Aside from representatives of the International War Crimes Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY), courts, Offices of Prosecutors of the Republic of Croatia, Republic of Serbia and BiH, representatives of diplomatic corps, OSCE, UNDP, and International Center for Transitional Justice, many artists, historians, journalists, and members of Parliament took part in the discussion. The goal of regional forums is to initiate public debate and consultations on truth-telling and truth-seeking mechanisms and procedures within civil societies and to urge national governments and Parliaments to take part in a broad based debate dealing with ways to provide justice for the victims, prevent recurrence of the crimes in the future and generally overcome the heavy burden of the heritage of the past.

Beginning of the conference was marked by a protest by approximately 150 members of victims’ associations from Croatia who carried banners with the names of Vukovar, Petrinje, Škabrnje, and other cities where crimes over Croatian population had been committed, as well as banners directed against the Chief Prosecutor of the ICTY, Ms. Carla del Ponte. Some of the representatives of victim associations’ who were invited to the conference took part in the protest but entered the Conference room carrying their banners and took part in the Conference from the very beginning. In their addresses to Conference organizers and participants they expressed their disapproval of the name of the Conference, claiming that victims are the only rightful owners of the truth. Organizers of the Conference accepted responsibility for the misunderstanding caused by the name of the Conference, and stressed that the purpose of the Conference is to discuss initiatives for establishing the truth and truth-telling procedures among all interested parties.

Conclusions of the Second Regional Forum

1. Societies in the region need to discuss and critically examine their own responsibility for the heavy burden of the past, as well as to document all cases of plight and injustice committed against all victims, regardless of their ethnic, political, and social background.

¹ Conference “Establishing the truth in post-conflict societies: initiatives and perspectives for Western Balkans“, First Regional Forum on Transitional Justice, Sarajevo, May 5 and 6, 2006

2. Regional partner organizations, Documenta, Humanitarian Law Center, and Research and Documentation Center, will continue organizing public debates and consultations in civil societies, in order to more efficiently influence regional governments and Parliaments to take part in debates on truth-telling and truth-seeking procedures and models, and help guarantee the respect for the dignity of the victims and the creation of the culture of accountability.
3. The cooperation that has been established between offices of prosecutors, courts, human rights organizations, and victims' associations in the region proved that regional approach is indispensable in truth-telling processes, which ultimately resulted in the voice of victims to be heard in war crimes trials.
4. Regional artists have undoubtedly shown their willingness to help fight the culture of silence, lies, war crimes denial, and attempts to revise historical facts about the past by tackling these issues in their work.
5. Regional partner organizations will encourage cooperation between government institutions, victims' associations, human rights organizations, and educational institutions in their effort to support debates and consultations on truth-telling and truth-seeking mechanisms.
6. Regional partner organizations will organize forums on transitional justice in Kosovo and in Montenegro which will also include civil society organizations from Macedonia and Slovenia. Once discussions and conclusions from all debates and consultations held with representatives of victims' associations and other groups and organizations in civil and political societies are unified, and no later than the beginning of 2008, ideas the participants wanted to convey will be much cleared, and it will be possible to identify the needs of victims' associations and other groups with respect to injustices inflicted upon them in the past, as well as their need to know the truth and see the justice done.
7. A very significant role in truth-telling and truth-seeking processes belong to ICTY archives, which must be readily available to all interested parties in the region and must be preserved for future generations.
8. All conference participants agreed that it is necessary to compile a list of names of all victims in order to create a historic memory and thwart revisionism attempts.
9. Regional partner organizations will organize the next forum in Belgrade at the end of May, 2007. In the meantime, consultations with victims' associations, war veterans' associations, and other marginalized groups such as women's, refugees', and youth initiative groups will be held. Meeting will be also held with professional groups and transitional justice experts.
10. Transcripts from this conference will be posted on organizers' respective web sites: www.documenta.hr; www.hlc.org.yu; www.idc.org.ba