



As partners, the Humanitarian Law Center (HLC), the Research and Documentation Center (RDC), and Documenta, initiated the process of regional consultations on mechanisms of truth-seeking and truth-telling about war crimes in the former Yugoslavia in May 2006. Consultations with associations of victims and war veterans, youth organizations, human rights organizations, artists, and journalists have been organized to date. Besides consultations with the aforementioned groups each attended by 35 participants, three regional forums have also been held which gathered a total of 900 civil society representatives from the post-Yugoslav countries. The First Regional Forum was organized in Sarajevo in May 2006; the Second was organized in February 2007 in Zagreb, and the Third in Belgrade in February 2008. During the third forum, HLC, RDC, and Documenta, triggered a debate on a possible regional commission for truth-seeking and truth-telling. Representatives of associations of victims, youth organizations, prosecutors, and judges strongly supported this initiative. The mandate and appellation of this regional commission was also the topic of a regional consultation with representatives of associations of victims, victims, and war veterans held on 9 May 2008, in Podgorica.

## Regional Consultation with Associations of Victims, Victims, and War Veterans on Mechanisms of Truth-seeking and Truth-telling about War Crimes in the former Yugoslavia

9 May 2008  
Podgorica, Montenegro

Representatives of associations of victims, victims, and war veterans from the post-Yugoslav countries that participated in a Regional Consultation in Podgorica on 9 May 2008 expressed support for the establishment of a Regional Commission for Truth-seeking and Truth-telling about War Crimes in the former Yugoslavia, whose mandate would be to establish and publicly disclose the facts about war crimes. Victims need to be acknowledged by others in the region and not only in their own national environment.

Participants believe that the initiative for establishing a Regional Commission will have strong support of victims in all post-Yugoslav countries, but they are also aware that this initiative cannot be implemented without political will of the national governments in the region and strong support from the international community.

In this consultative process, it is necessary to provide experts, who would help organize and implement investigative activities.

The creation of the Regional Commission needs a strong and broad support of participants of the consultative process, who can be mutually connected within the Regional Coalition. This Coalition should publicly advocate the establishment of a Regional Commission and it should also put pressure on national governments to trigger debate in national parliaments and show commitment to the process of dealing with the past. HLC, RDC, and Documenta should prepare a proposal for the Regional Coalition Membership and Action Protocol for advocating the Regional Commission.

Victims need to speak about their hardships, injustice, and the search for their family members. They also need to have their voice heard in public. They support public hearings of victims in the way they were organized during the Third Regional Forum in Belgrade. They believe that the Regional Commission should create a public platform for the voice of the victims. Serious consideration and deliberation should be devoted to the issue of war veterans and war crimes perpetrators, who are willing to admit their participation in war crimes.

The mandate of the Regional Commission for Truth-seeking and Truth-telling about War Crimes should be focused on truth-seeking about the gravest war crimes and missing persons.

The selection of the Regional Commission members should be delegated to a special appointing body comprising representatives of victims, human rights organizations, youth, representatives of national governments, a UN General Secretary's representative, and EU representatives.

The Regional Commission should open local and national offices that would operate under the central office, which would report directly to the Regional Commission.

One of the most significant resources for the work of the Regional Commission is the archive of the Hague Tribunal. In addition to having access to the publicly available documents in the Hague Tribunal archive, the Regional Commission should also have access to the confidential documents of the ICTY Office of the Prosecutor.

Media support is a prerequisite for creating a positive environment for the need of a regional approach to truth-seeking about war crimes. Strategies are needed for obtaining the support of the media. Communication experts within the Regional Coalition should be responsible for developing and implementing a communication strategy that would address this need.

## **Specific Activities**

It is necessary to design a web page and a blog that would provide information on consultations and development of the initiative for establishing the Regional Commission.

Prior to the next Regional Forum planned for the late June 2008, a series of one-day public debates should be organized where the conclusions from the recent regional consultations should be presented. These debates should gather representatives of associations of victims, victims, war veterans, youth, human rights organizations, and would convey a clear message to the public about the mutual solidarity and support among victims.