



Transitional Justice Bulletin

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Conclusions from the Regional Consultation with Youth on instruments for Truth-seeking and Truth-telling



The Humanitarian Law Center (HLC), Research and Documentation Center (RDC), and Documenta are facilitating a process of regional consultation with civil society on instruments for truth-seeking and truth-telling on war crimes committed in the former Yugoslavia.

Civil society has a leading role in all post-conflict societies in encouraging society and the institutions to open an official dialogue on war crimes, to create mechanisms for establishing and disclosing the facts about war crimes, and to build a culture of accountability.

On October 21, 2007, with the financial support of the Robert Bosch Foundation, the regional partners organized a regional consultation with youth about instruments and initiatives for establishing and disclosing the facts about war crimes in the former Yugoslavia.

Participants included 35 representatives from youth organizations from every post-Yugoslav country.

“Youth are not responsible for what happened but they are for taking a stand on what happened” - one of the participants who attended the regional consultation with youth.

Youth support the regional initiative for establishing the facts about war crimes committed in the former Yugoslavia. They see their role in creating a context in the region for supporting a regional body for truth-seeking and truth-telling. In this context, participants discussed the need for a travelling regional school, volunteer camps, and various seminars and trainings to educate youth about transitional justice. Existing human rights schools could focus part of their content on instruments of transitional justice.

Youth see themselves as having a role, as do other participants in the consultations, in the debate about the mandate of the regional body. A list of victims by name and the public disclosure of locations of





massive war crimes were noted as important tasks of a regional body.



Youth believe that the initiative for forming a regional body for truth-seeking and truth-telling must have legitimacy in its relation towards national governments and the UN as well as be transparently supported by civil society through the creation of a common platform and a petition.

It is important to build an interactive internet portal about past events, on which film material, photographs, documents, court documents, testimonies, documentary films and other material which contribute to establishing the facts about war crimes and the armed conflicts in the former Yugoslavia can be gathered and presented.

Informing and educating youth on the basis of facts is a prerequisite of building a future based on the values of, and respect for, human rights. The precondition for that is to establish facts which are regionally accepted. And such acceptance can only be reached through dialogue. Youth will use various forms of cooperation to support regional dialogue about war crimes committed in the past, about human rights, about freedom, about youth policies, through volunteer camps, travelling regional schools, exhibitions, trainings, seminars, etc. Within the regional dialogue it is necessary to develop joint responses in the event of denial of war crimes, which have been either confirmed by court judgments or for which indictments for war crimes or genocide exist.

It is necessary to conduct a mapping in the region of initiatives and projects which focus on dealing with the past and which could support the regional initiative for establishing the facts about war crimes. On the basis of such mapping, it will be possible to identify gaps and create synergies for new activities and projects.

Besides the regional context, the local and national levels are also important for supporting the initiatives for forming a regional body for truth-seeking and truth-telling.

Gaining the youth's support demands a youth-friendly approach. Information and communication about facts about the past must be presented with the style, language, message and approach of youth towards the past and future. Youth respond to a multidisciplinary approach.

The aim of the consultation must be clearly presented. Is it a matter of support for a regional body, the roles of youth and other consultation participants in establishing the facts and forming of a commission or of how to convey the facts which a regional body will establish to youth so that they are comprehensible?

The Regional Forum *Establishing Truth in Post-Conflict Period: Initiatives and Perspectives in the Western Balkans* organized in Sarajevo on 6 May 2006 started the process of regional civil society debate. A consultation with artists and writers from the region followed in December 2006. The second Regional Forum took place in February 2007. National consultations with youth took place in June and July 2007 in Belgrade, Sarajevo and Zagreb. A regional consultation with journalists was held in September 2007, also in Sarajevo, while a regional consultation with youth was held in Belgrade in October 2007. Regional and national consultations with associations of victims, women's groups, associations of war veterans, and professional groups, such as political scientists, historians, lawyers, sociologists, etc, are planned for 2008. On the basis of the conclusions from the national and regional consultations and regional forums, the regional partners will make recommendations on regional mechanisms for truth-seeking and truth-telling on war crimes which will be shared with national governments and the UN Security Council.

