



Kosovo Women's Network

Serving, Protecting and Promoting the Rights of Women and Girls

OPEN LETTER

Expressing Deep Concern for EULEX's Insensitive, Re-traumatization of the Inhabitants of Krushe e Vogel, Primarily Women

27 August 2015

Dear EULEX Head of Mission, Mr. Gabriele Meucci,

We are writing to express our deep concern and frustration with the mistreatment of the citizens of Krushe e Vogel, primarily women, by the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX) and to request your immediate response.

This letter, and the information within it, draws from the personal experience of Ms. Shpresa Shehu, Village Head of Krushe e Vogel, a close partner of the Kosovo Women's Network (KWN). We at KWN have worked closely with the women of Krushe e Vogel who were deeply affected by the war. As important background information, on 26 March 1999, 113 men and boys (all civilians), ranging from age 13 to elderly persons, disappeared or were killed, primarily by their Serbian neighbours. To date, only 45 have been found and buried; the village still awaits learning the fate of 68 others, more than 15 years later.

On 25 August 2015, representatives of the EULEX mission exhumed several bodies from the cemetery in Krusha e Vogel. The process through which remains were exhumed was completely inappropriate and insensitive to the families and village members. Only one person from the Hajdari family was informed that EULEX would come, and this information was provided only one night before EULEX's arrival. Further, EULEX came under the false pretext that it would only verify information and reunite bones that had been separated. Instead, the Department of Legal Medicine and EULEX began the exhumation of three brothers killed in the massacre of 26 March 1999: Nazim and Rasim Hajdari who had been buried on 26 March 2007; and Selajdini Hajdari who had been buried on 26 March 2009. All three brothers had supposedly been identified via DNA analysis by forensic experts. Notably, the brothers were buried on the same day in different years, as every year the citizens have a memorial in which they bury additional loved ones (as remains are slowly returned to them. Since they still have not received the bodies of all of their loved ones, each year they must mourn again their losses, in itself very traumatic.

On the morning of the excavation, Ms. Shpresa Shehu, the Head of the Village, who was not informed in advance of EULEX's visit, despite its sensitive nature, requested an explanation as to why EULEX had not informed her or other members of the village in advance. She requested further information as to the purpose of their visit. She was only then informed by the anthropologist that bodies needed to be exhumed because mistakes may have been made, and the DNA analysis needed to be repeated.

Florim Hajdari, a brother of the men whose believed remains were being exhumed, was understandably angered in that he had not been provided with complete information or prior notice. As they had not received a proper explanation regarding the purpose of EULEX's visit, the other

families in the village similarly became upset and terrified as to the fate of the remains of their loved ones. All families who believed they had finally buried their loved ones, some after years of waiting, began to doubt whether indeed their loved ones had been found. They became concerned as to whether the bodies of their loved ones would be exhumed as well. As the village is still waiting to clarify the fate of 68 missing persons, the idea that even those believed to have been found may not have been found was extremely traumatizing.

Furthermore, rather than addressing the community's growing fear and concern, EULEX put a yellow ribbon around the graveyard and insensitively continued the excavation. EULEX refused to respond to people's questions and forbid them from approaching the location in an attempt to understand what was occurring.

EULEX showed an utter lack of sensitivity and complete disrespect to the experiences and needs of the people of Krushe e Vogel, primarily women. As the Head of the Village wrote in her letter addressed to Kosovo institutions yesterday, the people of the village were "terrified" and re-traumatized by this experience. Beyond suffering extensive losses during the war, they continue to experience the trauma of waiting years for the remains of their loved ones to be returned, facing a river of broken promises by local and international institutions.

Further, while EULEX states that it is committed to implementing United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, in this instance it has failed; EULEX completely ignored its responsibility to involve women in decision-making positions in post-conflict processes, as the Head of the Village, was not even informed of EULEX's visit. Nor were the needs and interests of women affected by war considered.

This is not the first time that the people of Krushe e Vogel have been mistreated by international bodies supposedly there to protect them. On May 25, 2006, the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) also re-traumatized persons who suffered heinous crimes at the hands of the Serbian regime and their civilian neighbours. UNMIK brought an entourage of Serbs who had committed crimes in the village, without any prior notice or warning. When villagers reacted in fear, UNMIK used force against women and children, including throwing tear gas near the elementary school. We are deeply saddened and frustrated that the EULEX mission seems not to have learned from the mistakes of UNMIK, despite our pleas to do so.

The people of Krushe cannot live in peace because they have not buried their loved ones and they continue to be reminded of this by the poorly planned actions and inactions of international actors. They still do not have justice for the crimes committed against them.

We demand an immediately public apology to the people of Krushe e Vogel. Further, we call upon EULEX, from this day forward, to ensure that appropriate protocols are put in place and implemented that ensure complete information is provided to persons affected and that communities are informed well in advance. EULEX must meet with inhabitants, fully and transparently explain its aims, and address the concerns of village members. We kindly ask for your prompt address of our concerns.

Sincerely,



Igballe Rogova
Executive Director
Kosovo Women's Network