

KWN supports the Tireless and Transparent work of the Government Commission on Recognition and Verification of the Status of Sexual Violence Survivors during the Kosovo Liberation War

On June 18, Kosovo Women's Network (KWN) representatives visited the Government Commission on Recognition and Verification of the Status of Sexual Violence Victims During the Kosovo Liberation War. The aim of this visit was to gain a closer understanding with the progress of the process of recognizing and verifying the status of Sexual Violence Victims during the war, know the challenges that the Commission faces, as well as express KWN's support for the tireless and transparent work ethic of the Commission.

"We have been part of this Commission's journey since its establishment and we know it's impartial and transparency," said Ariana Qosaj-Mustafa, Chair of the KWN's Board.

Among the key challenges of the Commission's work, Minire Begaj-Balaj, the Chairperson of the Commission, listed the problem of incomplete cases that reach the Commission from the very beginning when they are brought for application, as well as delays in responding to verifiable requests made to organizations (which does not include the four organizations that are already authorized to receive the applications: Kosovar Rehabilitation Centre for Torture Victims (KRCT), Medica Kosova, Medica Gjakova and the Centre for Protection of Women's Rights (CPWR) in Drenas).

Further, Begaj-Balaj through figures briefed on the work of the Commission starting from its inception period in February 2018. She stated that from the beginning of the Commission's work, they have received 1,058 applications, of which 395 were approved, 152 were rejected, 52 are still proceeding, thus consisting 599 the number of all cases treated, while 461 remain in the treatment. She emphasized that most of the applicants are women, a small percentage of men, as well as that most applications are from the Albanian community, but there are also other communities applying for this status.

"However, the work is done and efficiency of the Commission should not be measured solely by the number of approved applications: we should take into consideration the fact that dealing with such cases sometimes means handling a single case up to six times as a result of incomplete files. In this way we would underhand that the figures for our work are mathematically higher than the number of approved cases, she said.

Appreciating the commitment of the Commission, Igballe Rogova, KWN's Executive Director said "As KWN has always pointed out, the will of the survivors should be respected in relation to the application process for recognition and verification of their status, because not everyone wants to apply. Therefore, providing an encouraging application environment, as well as providing the survivors with support and a confidential and impartial process is very important to us".

Recent developments in Kosovo, including the publication by MP Flora Brovina of a photograph aimed to witness the rape of a woman by Serbian military forces during the war in Kosovo, an act which KWN condemned, and later the authenticity of this image was contested, violate the dignity of sexual violence survivors, as well as serve as a discouragement for reporting from other sexual violence survivors. Furthermore, it serves as a dangerous precedent for all those individuals reporting sexual violence what they can expect from the process.

"After the publication of this photograph, we received numerous phone calls from sexual violence survivors who applied for their status and/or from their relatives seeking to withdraw the application fearing

that their testimonies and pictures will circulate publicly as well, and their confidentiality will be affected”, Begaj-Balaj stated.

Supporting the tireless work ethic and the transparency of the Commission, KWN repeats its call for everyone to be cautious, to offer their support for the survivors, and to build a more encouraging environment for the recognition and verification of the status of wartime sexual violence survivors in Kosovo.