



**QKRMT-KRCT**

Qendra Kosovare për Rehabilitimin  
e të Mbijetuarve të Torturës

The Kosova Rehabilitation  
Center for Torture Victims

# International Conference

Documentation of conflict related  
sexual violence: Standards and  
Practices

Post Conference Report

OCTOBER 18, 2022  
PRISHTINA, KOSOVO

# Table of Contents

01

Conference  
Summary

03

Program  
Overview

05

Recommendations

06

Highlight  
from  
keynote  
speakers



# Conference summary

This report outlines the outcomes of the international conference 'Documentation of Conflict Related Sexual Violence: standards and practices', which was organized by Kosova Rehabilitation Centre for Torture Victims in Prishtina, on the 18th of October 2022. This was a one-day conference and approximately 100 people were in attendance. The audience of the conference included, high level government officials, prosecutors, investigative police, lawyers, members of the Government Commission for recognition of the status of the victims of sexual violence, representatives of the Embassies of United Kingdom, Switzerland and United States in Kosovo, members of Academia, civil society organizations working with survivors and for survivors of war in Kosovo, Bosnia and Hercegovina and Serbia, networks, independent experts on transitional justice and survivors. During the conference, attendees shared opinions, thoughts and suggestions on the need for and importance of documenting conflict related sexual violence.

At the opening of this conference, the executive director Feride Rushiti, highlighted the importance of documenting sexual violence during and after the war, the challenges to document this invisible and macabre crime, which has been used as a war weapon. Also, she thanked all participants gathered from far away Colombia, Ukraine which is facing crimes of this nature to regional organizations from Bosnia and Hercegovina and Serbia to prove that crimes of sexual violence as a weapon of war can be documented and the importance of why they should be documented.

The conference keynote speakers were Feride Rushiti, Founder and Executive Director of KRCT, Albulena Haxhiu – Minister of Justice of the Republic of Kosovo, Thomas Kolly – Ambassador of Switzerland to the Republic of Kosovo, Fatmire Haliti – Documentation project manager at KRCT and Jule Krüger – Human Rights Data Consultant and Researcher, and Research Advisor, Quantitative Evidence and Analysis at Amnesty International.

During the day, conference participants had the opportunity to attend and discuss important topics in various sessions. At the first part of the conference it was discussed about the process of documentations and the Manual on documentation of conflict related sexual violence (Fatmire Haliti), and international practices of documenting and researching conflict related sexual violence (Jule Krüger).

While the second part of the conference was divided into two discussion panels. In the first panel, speakers Irina Dovgan and Volodymyr Shcherbachenko from SEMA Ukraine and Pilar Rueda and Angela Maria Escobar from SEMA Colombia shared their experiences and insights about international practices of documenting conflict related sexual violence. In the second panel, more regional perspective of documenting has been discussed by panel speakers Leonora Selmani from Government Commission (Kosovo), Sabiha Husic from Medica Zanica (Bosnia and Herzegovina) and Sanja Pavlovic from Autonomous Women Center (Serbia) describing the practice and status of documentation in Bosnia and Hercegovina and Serbia highlighting the importance of documentation of crime of sexual violence during the war focusing on relevant challenges, context, culture, mentality and other important values of the society.

At the conclusion of conference, the recommendations resulting from the conference discussions were presented and shared to the participants.

# Program Overview

## Background: Documentation of conflict related sexual violence project

The documentation of wartime sexual violence in Kosovo is a project initiated and implemented by the Kosova Rehabilitation Center for Torture Victims, aiming to create a large-scale, detailed record of cases of sexual violence during the 1998-1999 war in Kosovo. The project is implementing in collaboration with partner organizations such: Center for Promotion of Women Rights, Medica Kosova and Medica Gjakova.

Documentation is being carried out through use of a questionnaire developed and designed by KRCT exclusively for documentation purposes. The questionnaire contains 83 articles and is divided into 8 sections with questions covering incident data, methods of rape, health consequences, services provided, access to justice and reparations.

Also, KRCT is developing a manual based on its experience and Kosovo context of documenting wartime sexual violence, which aims to serve as a tool for sharing lessons learned in this process and presenting some guidelines for others who will engage in the documentation of conflict-related sexual violence.

## Objectives

The conference program aimed to accomplish these objectives:

- highlight the importance of documentation of conflict related sexual violence as a war crime;
- highlight the role of documentation in the process of dealing with the past;

- presentation of the Manual on Documentation of Conflict Related Sexual Violence based on case documentation conducted during the years 2019 - 2022 in Kosovo;
- discussion and sharing of international and regional standards and practices of the documentation process.

## Conclusion

Overall, the conference objectives were met and extensively discussed. There is indeed a pressing need for a stricter and concrete action that institutions, civil society, and other stakeholders have to adhere and contribute to documentation and its success rather than merely accepting the realities of stigma and prejudices that surround survivors and hinder them to talk about and document their painful past.

In its conclusions, the conference once again argued why documentation is important?

Documentation will serve as a precondition to:

- achieve legal and social recognition of the survivors of sexual violence in conflict;
- enable the survivors to benefit from the reparations scheme;
- achieve justice for survivors;
- acknowledge survivors suffers and pains and fight stigma that surrounds them;
- know the truth and fight all those who deny crimes;
- develop rehabilitation and reintegration programs for survivors;
- educate new generation and raise awareness at local, regional and international level;
- help and foster academic research on the sexual violence in conflict as a weapon of war;
- prevent the occurrence of sexual violence in other conflicts around the world.

# Recommendations

The conference recommended to all actors involved in the process of documenting conflict related sexual violence to:

**01**

Document crimes of sexual violence as soon as possible from the time when crimes occurred

**02**

Possess of as many physical evidences, documentary evidences, evidences of testimonies as well as digital ones (reports, photographs, or even forensic where possible, etc.). Often all these are used in a complementary way

**03**

Provide psychological support to survivors who share their stories continuously, that is, in all stages of documentation

**04**

Support survivors in the documentation process through a comprehensive and holistic approach

**05**

Prepare all preliminary procedures:

- Informing survivors about the goals of documentation;
- Development of questionnaires;
- Conducting interviews;
- Consent form;
- Data processing;
- Confidentiality and publication of data;
- Data storage;
- Meta data;
- Development of a general Manual (where all phases and steps of documentation are included) and its contextualization.

**06**

Strengthen cooperation with organizations and other institutional actors, including academic institutions

**07**

Maintain the chain of evidence (custody) - chronological documentation that records the structure of storage, control, transfer, analysis and disposition of materials, including physical or electronic evidence

The International Conference: Documentation of Conflict Related Sexual Violence was organized within the “Enhance Transitional Justice Efforts in Kosovo through Documentation of Wartime Sexual Violence” project supported by the Swiss Embassy in Kosovo. Contribution of the organizations to this conference and documentation process is supported by Swiss Embassy, BMZ, Medica Mondiale and British Embassy in Kosovo.

# Highlights| Keynote Speakers



Only by documenting the crimes of sexual violence in conflict, we can achieve justice for the victims, advocate for their rights, enable them to benefit from rehabilitation programs and reparations schemes, as well as fight stigma and educate new generations.

**Feride Rushiti** - Founder and Executive Director of KRCT

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Our institutions have recognized the victims of sexual violence from the war time very late, and in a society with a patriarchal mentality, it has not been easy for the victims in the first place. Ukraine should not follow the example of the documentation of Kosovo in the sense of time delays but take Kosovo as a good example in the documentation in terms of content. Also, in Kosovo, civil society is an excellent example of contributing to the documentation of crimes, where the needs and interests of the victims have always been at the center.

**Albulena Haxhiu** - Minister of Justice of the Republic of Kosovo

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Documentation is about establishing facts, and this means basis for not forgetting and not denying. So, documentation gives voice to victims and survivors. Also, psychological support is essential for survivors, by giving testimony it is painful and the risk that trauma comeback is very high. Further, fighting stigmatization need to be done at all levels, family, community, and society, especially considering patriarchal system of values, which is worldwide spread. And finally, it is important exchange of expertise build up through the years by civil society organization, such is KRCT is extremely important and at the same time the cooperation with institutions like Government Commission on recognition of status of survivors.

## **Thomas Kolly - Ambassador of Switzerland to the Republic of Kosovo**

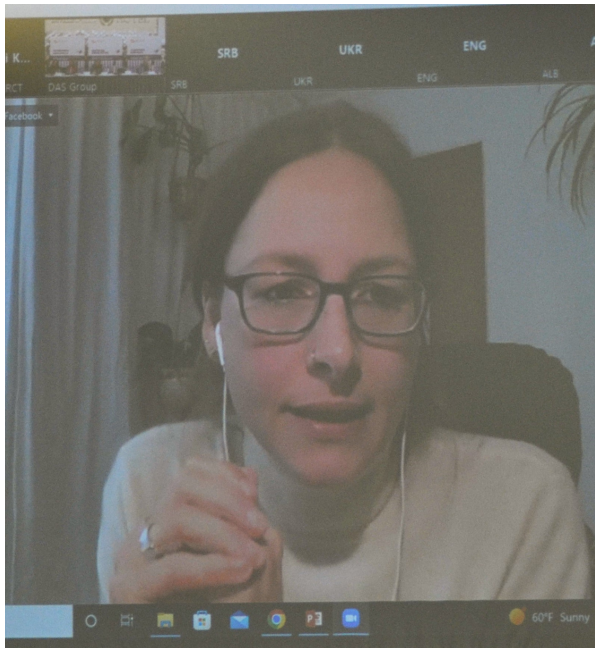
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At the national level, there has been no comprehensive documentation of cases of sexual violence that happened during the war in Kosovo. In this context, in 2019 KRCT jointly with other civil society organizations, started the process of documenting crimes of sexual violence during the war in Kosovo. And, functionalization of a sustainable documentation system established by KRCT has had success and results, and this has been an impetus for us to turn our experience into a guiding instrument that would serve others, where we have drafted a Manual for documenting crimes of sexual violence in conflict.

## **Fatmire Haliti - Documentation project manager at KRCT**

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Strategic partnership between practitioners and academics is quite important. KRCT is an example of where relevant services are embedded within the documentation process. And there's really an opportunity here for scholars to actually also meet that standard of adding value and benefiting survivors because the local project will advocate for survivors' rights and also take care of their well-being by offering support services. Also, CSOs and practitioners may receive expert collaboration at various stages of documentation and can be developed local organization capacity, as well as conducting research on the documentation process to inform current practice. In addition, this partnership amplifies survivors' voice by disseminating project insights within the academic community to enhance global scientific and policy discourse on conflict related sexual violence.

**Jule Krüger** - Human Rights Data Consultant and Researcher, and Research Advisor, Quantitative Evidence and Analysis at Amnesty International

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# Highlights| 1st Panel Speakers



The conference at which I was honored to attend was prepared at a high level. I have heard a lot of important things. Thank you for the opportunity to get the experience you have gained. Thank you for the opportunity to tell what is happening in Ukraine. For the past 7 months, I have been documenting the crimes of the Russian army in the de-occupied territory of the Kyiv region. During this time, I came across many cases of rape of women. Some cases were accompanied by special cruelty. According to my survey, 4-5% of women were raped in every village occupied by the Russians. Therefore, I emphasized that documenting crimes is important and necessary. This will provide an opportunity to bring criminals to justice.

**Irina Dovgan - SEMA, Ukraine**

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I appreciate this opportunity to exchange experience as well as learn from KRCT's extensive efforts in fighting for survivors' rights. The possibility to share information about the situation in Ukraine was also very important to me. I am deeply impressed by the support of the people and all branches of power of Kosovo for our country. I esteem this and will remember it.

**Volodymyr Shcherbachenko - EUCCI and SEMA, Ukraine**

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Trust is one of the main prerequisites in the process of documenting. In Colombia we created the collective denunciation sessions where the victims can denounce in a physical and emotional safe environment. This model is led by victims themselves, and we have held thirty conferences so far, where 1527 victims who previously did not want to report out of fear have reported. Afterwards, we have documented more than 650 cases, and then we realized that we need to systematize the information.

**Angela Maria Escobar - SEMA, Colombia**

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In Colombia, the victims who document become mediators between the victims and the justice system, and this is very important because it is the way to build trust. Another thing that is also very important is that the documentation made by victims helps to prevent re-victimization and prevent the stigmatization that is very frequent on the part of justice in any part of the world, of ordinary justice and of transitional justice. Something that is very important is the fact that documentation of sexual violence requires a gender approach.

**Pilar Rueda - SEMA, Colombia**

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# Highlights| 2nd Panel Speakers



In the process of documentation, the main challenges are missing documentation and emotional burden working on recognition of the legal status of the survivors of sexual violence during the war in Kosovo. The narrative story is the most important part of the application process, and it is very difficult for survivors to describe the story. With a proper documentation in place, it would have been much easier and less traumatized to proceed with recognition process.

**Leonora Selmani - Government Commission (RVSRPKLW), Kosovo**

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The documentation of crimes of sexual violence happened during the war in Bosnia and Hercegovina was self-developed over the years while gathering any type of documentation and evidence. Being aware of the importance of documentation of sexual violence during the war it is crucial to have a manual, guide that sets basic principles and criteria for documentation of crime of sexual violence considering also the specific circumstances, culture and mentality of the society.

**Sabiha Husić - Medica Zenica, Bosnia and Herzegovina**

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The public institutions in Serbia do not recognize the status of the victims of sexual violence during the war neither legally nor with any type of initiatives. The crime of sexual violence during the war is completely ignored by the official authorities and it is only the civil society organizations that raised the voice in support to the rights of this vulnerable group.

**Sanja Pavlović** - Autonomous Women Center, Serbia

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