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Center for Torture Victims



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POST CONFERENCE REPORT

**Advancing Access to Justice
for Survivors of Wartime
Sexual Violence:
*Criminal Accountability and
the Right to Compensation***



14 April 2026 | Pristina, Kosovo

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INTRODUCTION



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Executive Director, KRCT

On 14 April 2026, on the Memorial Day of Survivors of Sexual Violence during the Last War in Kosovo, the Kosova Rehabilitation Centre for Torture Victims (KRCT) organized a Regional Conference titled “*Advancing Access to Justice for Survivors of Wartime Sexual Violence*” in Pristina, bringing together representatives of justice institutions, legal experts, civil society organizations, and regional partners from Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Croatia. This was the first time that judges and prosecutors from the region gathered to discuss war crimes in Kosovo.

The conference was considered a necessary moment to refocus attention on the issue of justice for survivors of sexual violence during the war. It was emphasized that this meeting was not merely an institutional activity, but a clear commitment to addressing existing gaps in justice systems and promoting a fairer, more humane and inclusive approach.

During the proceedings, it was underscored that justice cannot be limited to the criminal prosecution of perpetrators of crimes, but must also include institutional recognition of endured experiences, access to effective reparations, continuous psychosocial support, and the reclamation of survivors’ dignity.

It was recalled that 14 April is not only a day of remembrance, but also a call for ongoing collective responsibility toward the thousands of women and men who experienced sexual violence during the war in Kosovo. It was emphasized that the courage of survivors in breaking the silence has played a crucial role in changing public discourse, challenging stigma, and advancing justice processes.

The conference took place in an atmosphere of serious regional cooperation, enabling the exchange of experiences among judges, prosecutors, and experts regarding war crimes, particularly cases of sexual violence. The discussions highlighted practical and institutional challenges, including evidentiary standards, procedural obstacles, victim compensation, and the need for trauma-sensitive approaches in judicial processes.

A particular dimension of the conference was the direct inclusion of survivors’ voices, who recalled that justice represents not only legal accountability, but also a fundamental process of healing, recognition, and restoration of dignity. The conference also reaffirmed the importance of strengthening regional and institutional cooperation, as well as advancing victim-oriented approaches in dealing with sexual violence crimes during the war.

Finally, deep gratitude was expressed to all participants for their cooperation and professionalism during this conference. Although this report reflects several examples of positive impact, its true measure of success lies in how the shared knowledge, experiences, and recommendations will be transformed into concrete actions in the future, aimed at advancing justice for survivors of conflict-related sexual violence.

✦ CONTEXT

Post-war societies in the Western Balkans continue to face significant challenges in addressing war crimes. Despite progress in accountability efforts, conflict-related sexual violence remains among the least prosecuted crimes, while survivors continue to face systemic barriers in accessing justice, protection, and reparations.

Although in recent years significant steps have been taken in the prosecution of war crimes and in the institutional recognition of survivors of conflict-related sexual violence in Kosovo, justice for victims remains incomplete without the effective realization of the right to compensation.

The right to compensation is widely recognized as a core component of transitional justice and an internationally established standard in the protection of human rights. However, in practice, survivors of conflict-related sexual violence continue to face multiple barriers in exercising this right. Complex court procedures, reliance on civil litigation pathways, lack of harmonization in judicial practice, as well as challenges in the enforcement of compensation orders, remain serious obstacles to the effective realization of the right to compensation.

Regional experience has demonstrated that integrating compensation within criminal proceedings, as part of the criminal judgment, can play an important role in reducing the additional burden on victims and ensuring a more comprehensive form of justice. In this context, judges and prosecutors have a key role not only in ensuring criminal accountability, but also in advancing jurisprudence that recognizes and guarantees victims' rights, including the right to compensation and effective reparation. Furthermore, the development of victim-centered and trauma-informed approaches is essential to prevent re-traumatization and to ensure dignified treatment of survivors throughout the judicial process.

Taking these challenges and needs into account, the Kosova Rehabilitation Centre for Torture Victims (KRCT) organized the Regional Conference "Advancing Access to Justice for Survivors of Wartime Sexual Violence", with the aim of creating a regional platform for exchanging experiences, discussing judicial practices, and advancing professional dialogue on justice, reparations, and the protection of the rights of survivors of conflict-related sexual violence.

Objectives of the Conference

- ✦ Exchange experiences and lessons learned among judges and prosecutors engaged in war crimes and sexual violence cases.
- ✦ Address key challenges in the investigation, prosecution, and adjudication of these crimes, including procedural issues.
- ✦ Examine existing frameworks for reparations and compensation for survivors, including judicial and administrative mechanisms.
- ✦ Promote a trauma-informed and survivor-centered approach in judicial proceedings.

✦ SUMMARY

On 14 April 2026, marking the Memorial Day of Survivors of Sexual Violence during the Last War in Kosovo, the Kosova Rehabilitation Centre for Torture Victims (KRCT) organized the Regional Conference entitled “*Advancing Access to Justice for Survivors of Sexual Violence During the War.*” The Conference brought together judges, prosecutors, legal experts, institutional representatives, and civil society organizations from Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Croatia, to exchange regional experiences and discuss challenges in addressing crimes of conflict-related sexual violence.

The Conference took place on a day of particular symbolic and social significance for Kosovo, creating a space for reflective and professional dialogue on the need for comprehensive justice, institutional accountability, and effective reparations for survivors.

In her opening remarks, KRCT Executive Director, Dr. Feride Rushiti, emphasized the importance of strengthening regional cooperation and the need for victim-oriented approaches in addressing cases of sexual violence during the war. She stressed that progress in the field of justice requires not only sustained institutional engagement but also a high degree of sensitivity toward survivor experiences, placing their dignity at the center of every process.

Welcoming remarks were also delivered by institutional representatives, including Ardian Gola, Deputy Speaker of the Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo, who reiterated the importance of consolidating accountability mechanisms and interinstitutional cooperation in addressing war crimes. Minister of Justice, Donika Gërvalla-Schwarz, highlighted the need for continued institutional commitment to guaranteeing access to justice, reparations, and support for survivors, while reaffirming the significance of interinstitutional cooperation and sustained state commitment in addressing war crimes. Meanwhile, Mirjeta Shala, member of the Kosovo Judicial Council, underscored the role of the judiciary in ensuring impartial and trauma-sensitive proceedings, reiterating the institutional commitment to strengthening trust in the justice system. Across all remarks, a shared institutional position emerged regarding the need to advance justice for survivors and strengthen victim-centered approaches.



The Voice of Survivors

An important part of the Conference was the personal reflections shared by survivors of sexual violence during the war. This gave the event a powerful human dimension and served as a reminder of the importance of continuing efforts toward justice and dignity.



Vasfije Krasniqi

Vasfije Krasniqi shared her personal testimony and emphasized the significance of breaking public silence:

“Today is 14 April. A date that for many may seem like just another day on the calendar... but for me, it is the day my life changed forever. I was only 17 years old when I sought justice, but that justice was denied to me. Nevertheless, I did not remain silent. In 2018, I decided to speak publicly, and today I feel proud that, thanks to that initiative, four other cases have managed to obtain the justice they deserved.”



Shyrete Tahiri

Following this, **Shyrete Tahiri** emphasized the importance of perseverance in the pursuit of justice and encouraged other survivors not to remain silent:

“I have taken my step, I have sought justice, and I will never give up until I achieve justice. I do not want anyone else to remain silent as I once did. Today, I encourage you: take your step as well. Seek justice.”



Ramadan Nishori

Likewise, **Ramadan Nishori** spoke about the importance of truth, justice, and restoring dignity:

“Do not keep your truth in silence. Do not allow fear or prejudice to stop you. Seek justice because justice is a part of healing and the restoration of our dignity!”

These testimonies resonated throughout the Conference as a reminder that justice for survivors is not only connected to legal procedures and criminal accountability, but also to public recognition, the restoration of dignity, and the empowerment of their voices in society.

✦ PANEL DISCUSSIONS



The first panel addressed the topic “*Sexual Violence Crimes During the War: From Jurisprudence to Compensation – Ensuring Comprehensive Justice.*” Discussions focused on the jurisprudential developments achieved so far in the region, analyzing how cases of conflict-related sexual violence have been addressed in judicial practice and what lessons can be drawn from these experiences. An important part of the discussion was dedicated to ongoing procedural challenges and

evidentiary standards, including the complexity of building cases many years after the crimes were committed, as well as the need for a more unified and sensitive regional approach.

It was emphasized that these cases require not only high legal expertise, but also careful approaches that recognize the nature of trauma and the difficulties survivors face in giving testimony. The idea that good judicial practices contribute to strengthening trust in the justice system was also discussed. Furthermore, it was underscored that compensation for survivors constitutes an essential element of comprehensive justice, which should be effectively integrated into judicial proceedings and state reparation schemes, ensuring recognition and redress for the harm suffered.

The panel consisted of Ljiljana Stipišić, Judge at the High Criminal Court of Croatia; Valon Kurtaj, Judge at the Court of Appeals of Kosovo; Klaudia Kuljuh from the organization “Trial International” in Bosnia and Herzegovina; and Makifete Saliuka, lawyer and victims’ legal representative in court, engaged by KRCT in Kosovo. The panel was moderated by Selvete Gërzhaliu-Krasniqi, member of the KRCT Board and former Judge of the Constitutional Court of Kosovo.



The second panel focused on the topic “*Advancing Accountability for Conflict-Related Sexual Violence Crimes: The Role and Responsibility of the Prosecution.*” Discussions emphasized the key role of the prosecution in building sustainable cases and ensuring effective, independent investigations based on professional and legal standards. The importance of interinstitutional coordination, including cooperation with the police, judiciary, and victim support mechanisms, was discussed

as a prerequisite for successful investigations in complex war crimes cases.

Special attention was given to the integration of trauma-informed approaches into investigative and judicial work, aiming not only to improve the quality of proceedings but also to avoid the re-traumatization of survivors during procedures. Discussions also addressed the practical challenges prosecutors face in gathering evidence after a long period of time, the lack of direct evidence, and the need for more effective use of supporting evidence and regional cooperation.

The panel consisted of Miroslav Dasović, Deputy at the Office of the County State Prosecutor in Osijek, Croatia; Tarik Crnkčić, Prosecutor at the Special Department for War Crimes in Bosnia and Herzegovina; Ilir Morina, Special Prosecutor and Head of the Department for the Investigation of War Crimes in Kosovo; and Leonora Selmani, Chairperson of the Government Commission for the Recognition and Verification of the Status of Victims of Sexual Violence during the Kosovo Liberation War. The panel was moderated by Mehmet Musaj, Senior Manager at KRCT.

✦ IDENTIFICATION OF CHALLENGES

The discussions during the Conference highlighted several common regional challenges that continue to affect the advancement of justice for survivors of conflict-related sexual violence. Participants emphasized that, despite the progress achieved in prosecuting war crimes cases, significant obstacles remain in ensuring effective and comprehensive access to justice for survivors.

In particular, the following key challenges were identified:

- ✦ **Lack of effective compensation for victims** – From the outset of the discussions, participants highlighted the lack of effective compensation as one of the most serious challenges in ensuring justice for survivors of conflict-related sexual violence. The importance of treating compensation as an integral part of justice, rather than a secondary element of criminal proceedings, was reaffirmed.
- ✦ **Difficulties in securing evidence in cases of sexual violence during the war** – It was emphasized that the passage of time since the commission of the crimes, the lack of initial documentation, and the sensitive nature of such cases continue to pose serious challenges to the collection and administration of evidence. The importance of using professional and trauma-informed approaches when taking testimonies was also discussed.
- ✦ **Risk of re-traumatization during proceedings** – It was stressed that survivors often face forms of re-traumatization during interviews, investigative procedures, and court proceedings. In this context, the importance of victim-centered approaches and the establishment of procedures that guarantee safety, dignity, and adequate support for survivors was highlighted.
- ✦ **Need for continuous professional capacity-building within justice institutions** – The need for ongoing training for judges, prosecutors, and other relevant professionals was identified, with a focus on the handling of cases of conflict-related sexual violence, international standards, and trauma-informed approaches.



✦ RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the discussions and exchanges of regional practices, the Conference resulted in the following key recommendations:

Drafting and adopting a comprehensive state strategy for addressing war crimes in Kosovo

The development of a coordinated and long-term strategy would address, in a structured manner, the investigation, prosecution, and adjudication of war crimes, including cases of conflict-related sexual violence during the war. It was emphasized that such an approach would contribute to strengthening institutional coordination, defining priorities, increasing the efficiency of justice mechanisms, and promoting more victim-centered approaches.

Effective guarantee of the right to compensation through criminal judgments

Treatment of compensation as an integral part of criminal justice, rather than as a secondary or solely administrative mechanism, emerged as one of the Conference's key recommendations. More specifically, it was recommended that domestic practices be harmonized with international standards applied in the region, so that criminal courts adjudicate victims' compensation claims within criminal proceedings. This approach avoids duplicate proceedings, reduces the burden on victims, and ensures the full and immediate realization of their rights.

Harmonization of domestic practices with international standards and regional practices concerning reparations

It was recommended to strengthen the harmonization of legislation and judicial practice with international human rights standards and good practices developed in the region, with the aim of creating more unified and effective approaches to addressing cases of sexual violence during the war.

Strengthening cooperation between justice institutions and non-governmental organizations in supporting victims

It was assessed that interinstitutional cooperation remains essential for providing comprehensive support to survivors, including legal aid, psychosocial support, and guidance throughout judicial proceedings.

Preventing re-traumatization through the use of technology

The importance of using procedural mechanisms that minimize the need for repeated testimonies and reduce survivors' exposure to re-traumatizing experiences during investigative and judicial proceedings was emphasized. Therefore, the systematic use of audio and video recording during the questioning of victims was recommended, so that such testimonies may subsequently be used throughout judicial proceedings.



Review of sentencing policies for fairer proportionality

The discussions highlighted the need for more consistent sentencing policies that are proportionate to the gravity and long-term consequences of these crimes, thereby contributing to strengthening trust in the justice system and combating impunity.

Continued investment in the training and specialization of judges, prosecutors, and investigators

It was recommended to further advance professional capacities through specialized training on handling cases of sexual violence during the war, international standards, trauma-informed and victim-centered approaches.

Addressing stigma and empowering the voices of survivors

Stigma and social prejudice continue to be among the main barriers discouraging survivors of conflict-related sexual violence from seeking justice and institutional support. Participants emphasized the need for sustained institutional and societal engagement to combat stigma and to support victims in their pursuit of justice.

During the closing session, the importance of continuing regional professional exchanges and establishing more sustainable mechanisms of cooperation among judicial and prosecutorial institutions in the region was emphasized. It was underscored that regional cooperation remains an important component in advancing professional practices, strengthening accountability, and developing more effective approaches in addressing crimes of sexual violence during the war. The Conference confirmed that access to justice for survivors of sexual violence during the war remains a complex process that requires not only accountability, but also institutional recognition, effective reparations, and continuous support for survivors.



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