



Udruženje "Zaboravljena djeca rata"

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Greetings everyone, my name is Ajna Jusić, I am a child born out of wartime rape in Bosnia and Herzegovina. I'm member and president of the Association Forgotten children of war. Today's event represents a unified voice of support and the struggle of everyone present for the legal and social recognition of children born of wartime sexual violence.

Children born during war as a product of rape often face problems in a post-conflict society such as socio-economic marginalization, family rejection, stigmatization and violence (this has been mostly evident in the cases of children from BiH and Rwanda). Also, these people struggle with their identity and a sense of belonging. Very often their mothers do not want to say how the children were conceived.

Children conceived through rape and/or sexual abuse are the most vulnerable part of the population affected by war, deprived, insecure and suffer through violence. They don't have access to any fundamental rights such as the right to be protected from stigma and discrimination, the right to identity, nationality, family and survival. There is a clear need for the formation of legal tools and laws with which children born of war can exercise their rights.

Looking at its legal issues, BiH has not yet established a single register of data on children born as a result of systematic war rape. Also, due to the great stigma within the Bosnian society, children born as a result of war rape were deprived of information about their biological origin.

During the post war period, the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina did not take any institutional measure at the state level to ensure the visibility and rights of this category of children, which is reasonable and understandable given that BiH faced an enormous number of women survivors of sexual violence. In order to realize their rights, children born of war must actively participate and be a part of creating public policies in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Since 2018, the Association "Forgotten Children of War" has been working on processes for the introduction and realization of the rights of children born of war in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

When we talk about the relationship between a mother and a child, the biggest risk is transgenerational trauma. According to the data of our Association, most children born of war grew up with a mother, while a smaller number of children grew up without parental care or were given up for adoption.

Looking at the experiences of children born of war, most of them, together with their mothers, were forced to move from place to place throughout their lives, which was caused by stigmatization and discrimination from their local community. For example, my mother and I moved several times, and I, as an independent adult, moved twice hoping to find a city where I would not be discriminated against for not having a "father's name" in my documents, which was obligatory in most official documents in the patriarchal state of BiH. Furthermore, as far as the members of the Association are concerned, some of them show clear signs of PTSD, which officially confirms the thesis of transgenerational trauma. This form of trauma in members is manifested through various forms of depression or other somatic symptoms.

We are often deemed a hidden population as the circumstances in which we were born often lead to stigmatization and discrimination.

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We are still exposed to the whip of social judgement and political disregard. Precisely because of this, our mothers try as hard as they can to hide the identities of our fathers, which increasingly makes mapping and unifying children born of wartime rape in a particular country more difficult.

As a population, we are neglected, and by birth carry life threatening risks and permanent damage. This can include: infanticide, abandonment by birth, statelessness, stigmatization and discrimination, physical violence, emotional abuse, little to none access to education, malnutrition, poor health poverty, homelessness, becoming a part of armed or criminal activities and increased risk of radicalization.

All the forms of stigmatization and discrimination that children born of war survived in society have led to the fact that many of them today have a lot of difficulties with self-confidence and making friendly or emotional connections. Continuous discrimination against children is directly correlated with their satisfaction with the quality of life. Discrimination has directly affected their health, where the experiences of our members indicate that certain diseases in children are caused by stress. Through conversations with our members, we saw some patterns of behavior in children born because of the war: most of them state that they constantly tried to find new mechanisms for avoiding these prejudices, how to generally avoid such situations, which in several cases led to self-isolation of the child for not having appropriate coping mechanisms. Today, from this perspective, all of us from the Association equally believe that the only recipe and adequate mechanism for combating discrimination is actually **BREAKING SILENCE WITH OUR VOICE!** As long as we are silent, we create space for stigmatization and discrimination.

This transgenerational effect of sexual violence mixed with conflict must be urgently recognized and dealt with. In the general lack of specific, targeted, national and international policies and laws to address our needs, risks and damages, will probably multiply and increase throughout the lifespan of the children. A lost childhood becomes an insecure adulthood, and human rights become an illusion.

Our mothers are exposed to double stigmatization, as survivors and our mothers. Without support, women and girls suffer severe physical, psychological, social and economic effects of forced motherhood. The damages and shortcomings our mothers face is transferred to us, their children, who are branded as children born of wartime rape.

The global and national communities must face the taboos and complexities about the reproductive violence, bringing to forced motherhood, conception and birth, birth as a consequence of violence.

The existence of children born of wartime sexual violence, consequences of pregnancy and motherhood, likely ending in birth, following rape must not remain euphemisms in the resolutions of United Nations and other international political actors.

The constant normative and practical marginalization of children born on sexual wartime rape and their „forced mothers“ in post conflict societies are a significant obstacle to sustainable and inclusive peace, reconciliation and transitional justice. The processes of transitional justice which do not recognize nor enforce the rights of children born of sexual violence, cannot fulfill their goals which include: the truth, reconciliation, responsibility, and reparation delivery.

The denial of the rights of children born of wartime sexual violence cannot be compared with the demand of human rights of universality.

Some members of the Forgotten Children of War Association speak publicly today. They openly talk about everything they have survived and all agree that it is much easier for them knowing they are not alone, and that other children with the same / similar experiences are standing next to them. The

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community / safe zone that the Association has created for its members is something that gives members motivation and inspiration for the future. The feeling that they are not alone in the world is something they all claim to be one of the most important to be able to function.

The creators of policies must take care of children born of sexual wartime violence. The association Forgotten children of war is ready to transfer their experiences anywhere in the world.

We are ready because we do not want to take part in future wars. We do not want to take part in future rapes. We do not want to take part in the policies that allowed us to go through this kind of suffering and pain.

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