



Press Release

New York, March 17, 2019

Former Deputy Prime Minister and Chief Negotiator Edita Tahiri in the capacity of the Chairperson of the Regional Women's Lobby for South East Europe (RWLSEE) was present at the UN where she attended the proceedings of the 63rd session of the Commission on the Status of Women, invited by UN Women in New York, USA.

In the UN panel on "The Way to 2020: Accelerating Action for Women, Peace and Security," Edita Tahiri was together with the group of UN top leaders on women status, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, UN Deputy Secretary General and UN Women Executive Director, Jean-Pierre LaCroix, UN Deputy Secretary of United Nations for Peace Operations and many other personalities from different countries.

The purpose of this session is to make use of the twentieth anniversary of the Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000), which is approaching soon in 2020, and provide a unique opportunity for member states, international organizations and civil society to increase the momentum and accelerate the action towards the implementation of the above-mentioned resolution. This interactive session provided space for the participants at the 63rd session of the Commission on the Status of Women to express their ideas and concerns, and to contribute to the priorities that are being formulated by key actors and decision-makers. Speakers presented their vision and ideas for 2020, including the issue on how they should be related to the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration on Empowering Women, as well as the five-year review of Sustainable Development Goals.

Edita Tahiri's speech at the UN:

Thank you for the invitation to be here with you today. I come from Kosovo. I am here to represent the organization I have been leading for 12 years now, the Regional Women's Lobby of Southeast Europe. The Regional Women's Lobby is a unique women's organization for regional peace building that we established after the end of the tragic wars in the Balkan region, in the process of the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia and the birth of the seven new states including here my state of Kosovo as well.

We women leaders of politics and society joined together with lots of difficulties because we had moved from the period of war to that of peace and we belonged to different sides in the history of these wars. But we managed to find the values that united us for the future, peace and empowerment of women, thinking more about the future than about the past, but never forgetting the tragic past that stroke us hard even to genocide. We are a model to be taken for the world in regards to the post-conflict regions because with our dedicated work we have managed to help build peace and reconciliation among the nations of the seven states born out of war and tragedy. We remain committed to our mission to empower women, peace, security, justice, prosperity and Euro-Atlantic integration of our states and the Western Balkans region, but we need more support from all of you and the UN in particular because this is how we will be able to achieve our common goals.

Next year we mark very important anniversaries for Resolution 1323 and the Beijing Platform, therefore new decisions on these anniversaries should be historic for the empowerment of women because women have a strategic potential for the development and peace in the world and they are a new force upcoming to this world in the 21st century.

We the women leaders of the region united at the Women's Regional Lobby, which is a unique organization for peace building and reconciliation among the people of the seven Balkan countries,

have been working diligently in building the peace. However, some narrow sighted men leaders want new wars with dangerous ideas of touching the borders which only serves the dangerous geopolitical agendas of those who lost influence and hegemony.

Balkan is in a situation where peace has not been completed yet, thus, a fast integration of seven countries into EU and NATO is necessary, before Balkan might set the next coming surprise.

Remember that the Balkan has already surprised the world twice because two world wars started exactly in this region. Do not let the current achievements of peace building and security fall apart due to geopolitical ambitions of the non-western countries that feel nostalgic about it, starting from the times when they suffered the losses after the end of the Cold War.

We need more women in decision-making, political processes and negotiating processes to find it more likely to create a sustainable peace and stability in the Western Balkans region. The empowerment of women in politics guarantees the participation of women in peace building talks, at formal round tables of peace processes, where peace-making decisions are made. Of course, the entire peaceful process requires the equal inclusion of women at all levels, where the bottom up approach is of great importance by also empowering the women at the local level.

Women should be protagonists in resolving difficult issues and become relevant parts of peace talks. This I did myself, personally, by engaging in the Kosovo's independence movement as one of the main leaders. This protagonism has enabled me to become a negotiator of peace at the formal negotiating tables, even as the Chief negotiator, at the Rambouillet Conference in 1999, the London Conference in 1992 and the Chief Negotiator in the Brussels Dialogue 2011-2017.

Although there were five peaceful processes for ending the wars in the Balkans in the process of the dissolution of former Yugoslavia, the representation of women in these processes was minimal. I am the only women peace negotiator in the whole Balkans, participating directly in peace negotiations for ending wars and establishing peace. Despite this fact, UN Reports and world centers reporting on conflict resolution issues, do not mention or they mention very little the Balkan wars, and the role of women in the conflict resolution. Today, this is the first time I speak here at the UN about my role in peace processes and share with you my experiences on war and peace. The Balkan is seen through peaceful and calm Europe whereas when talking about conflicts it is commonly Africa, Asia or the Middle East that captures the attention. The story of the three wars we had suffered in Kosovo, Bosnia and Croatia from Serbia's aggression should not be ignored because ignoring it could cost us a lot.

The issue of the rape of women during the wars in Kosovo, Bosnia and Croatia was ignored by international instances many years after the end of the wars in 1999. Rape was a great tragedy, but the greatest tragedy is ignoring and hiding this genocidal crime. International justice must act and bring the dignity back to the victims, while the criminals should receive a well-deserved punishment. Imagine that finally today, after five years, I managed to submit to the UN a petition of Kosovo citizens addressed to the UN Secretary-General seeking justice for victims of sexual violence during the war in Kosovo. This petition has been ready to deliver since 2014; however, our request to submit it encountered the UN's silence.