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KOSOVAR WOMEN CALL FOR INCLUSION IN PEACE PROCESS

AdvocacyNet
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Pristina, Kosovo and Washington, DC, March 8, 2006: A powerful coalition of Kosovar women's organizations has criticized the United Nations and the government of Kosovo for the absence of women on the seven-man Kosovar team that is negotiating the future status of the province, and warned that the lack of a gender perspective in the talks will undermine any future democracy in Kosovo.

The complaint is contained in an open letter to the UN's Special Representative, Soren Jessen-Peterson, on the occasion of International Women's Day (March 8). "The women of Kosova are concerned that their voices have been ignored or marginalized by both national and the UNMIK leadership," says the letter.

Also today, one of the signatories of the letter, the Kosova Women's Network (KWN), announced that it is joining with the renowned Serbian group, Women In Black, to monitor the status talks for a gender component.

In a telephone interview with the Advocacy Project (AP), Igo Rogova, the president of the KWN, said that the letter comes from all sides of the women's movement in Kosovo. "We are in one voice—Albanian, Serb, Turkish, Roma—all saying one word: women's inclusion in the negotiations," she said.

The Kosova Women's Network, an AP partner, comprises 85 women's groups, including six Serbian and five Roma organizations.

The KWN and its allies have proposed that Adita Tahiri, an experienced politician, join the negotiating team. They also want to see a woman in all of the subject-specific working groups that are being organized as part of the talks.

The UN maintains that Kosovar's political leaders should appoint the negotiators, but Rogova insisted that the UN has a mandate under UN Resolution 1325 to ensure women's participation.

"No, it is not his job to appoint [women]," she said, referring to the UN's Jessen-Peterson. "His job is to put pressure on my government because... it's still UN Administered in Kosovo. They (the UN) have total authority."

Rogova said the protest letter will be sent to political parties and followed up today in Pristina with marches, press interviews, and meetings with political leaders. The campaign will continue until the demands are met, she said, pointing out that civil society was able to force the resignation of Kosovo's former Prime Minister Bajram Kosumi on March 1.

The women's initiative comes at a sensitive time in the negotiations over the future of Kosovo, which has remained a province of Serbia since the 1999 war. Both sides remain far apart, with the Kosovars insisting on full independence and the Serbians demanding that the province remain part of Serbia.

The UN is attempting to find middle ground and has asked Martti Ahtisaari, the former president of Finland, to coordinate. A decision on Kosovo's final status is expected within a year.

Rogova argued that gender must be integrated into the final status talks because women bring different perspectives from men. For example, women are more insistent that the fate of missing persons be resolved. Looking forward, Rogova expressed the hope that there would be a quota for women in any future Parliament.

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Rogova also said there should be more women on the UN negotiating team, and complained that there is only one woman in the office of UN envoy Martti Ahtisaari.

* For a copy of the letter, see the KWN website: <http://www.womensnetwork.org/>

* For AP's 2000 coverage of Kosovo's civil society, see:

http://www.advocacynet.org/cpage_view/kosovo_summary_3_6.html

* For AP's profile of Igo Rugova's work on behalf of Kosovo women, see:

http://www.advocacynet.org/cpage_view/kosovo_igorogova_3_52.html

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The Advocacy Project

1326 14th Street NW, Washington DC 20005 | +1 202 332 3900

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