

Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina Adopts the Law on the Protection of Civilian Victims of War

(Sarajevo, August 1st 2023) Three decades after the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the civilian victims of war finally got to witness a social and legal turning point in the society after a Proposal of the Law on the Protection of Civilian Victims of War in Federation of BiH was adopted. Children born of wartime rape were recognized as a special category with equal rights in the society. In addition, the rights of civilian victims of war, including victims of conflict-related sexual violence, have been defined and bolstered.

Adoption of this Law once again confirmed that the government needs to be in touch with real needs of all members of the society. Civil society organizations worked hard on this Proposal, together with victims' associations, thus proving that cooperation of all pillars of society is needed to achieve results suited for a functioning democratic society.

TRIAL International was among the organizations that worked on the text of the Law. **Ajna Mahmić**, Legal Advisor at TRIAL International in BiH, commented on this historic step: „This Law is a result of our joint effort towards recognizing and addressing the suffering of civilian victims of war in Federation of BiH. In addition to advancing the scale of the rights for survivors, this Law also sets strong foundations for encouraging empathy, understanding and reconciliation within our society. Although we waited for this Law for so many years, and even though it has its imperfections, we are looking forward to the changes it will bring.”

In addition to the recognition of status for children born of war, this Law also ensures their material rights, such as co-funding of education and priority when enrolling into state higher education institutions. These rights were something that children of war veterans and soldiers who died in the war already had access to in the entire Bosnia and Herzegovina. It's also worth noting that although a similar law was passed in Brčko District last year. However, it only granted recognition of the status and was of symbolic nature.

Alen Muhić, from the **Forgotten Children of War** association, welcomed the Law and shared his personal experience: “For me this Law is especially important. The first time I spoke up I was 9, and today I am 30 and a father to two boys. I'm glad that the day has come for representatives of the government to hear our voice, the voice of justice and equality. The moment the state stands next to you and shows you that it supports you with its laws and that you are an equal member of society, the fight against social stigma and discrimination becomes easier and more effective.” He added that we cannot have a system that supports war criminals and neglects the victims. “My sons cannot inherit this social stigma.”

Ajna Jusić, the President of **Forgotten Children of War** association, thank everyone for support, stating that the battle for rights of children born of war was long, but that they persevered. Last year, the government of Brčko District also adopted a similar Law, which recognized the rights of children born of wartime rape, but without any concrete benefits, such as medical care and education, which was addressed in FBiH Law.

In addition to the aforementioned, the Law also introduces some new benefits for civilian victims of war in FBiH, such as the right to priority medical care, including medical spa rehabilitation. **Midheta Kaloper**, President of the victims' association **Foča 92-95** welcomed these changes and



thanked everyone who worked on the Proposal of the Law. “The fact is that we waited for too long, for thirty years. I am sorry that many of our heroines did not live to see this Law and get the rights that they deserved. I hope that the government will stop looking at us as social cases and that the rights outlined in the Law will be respected throughout the entire Federation of BiH.

The Law on the Protection of Civilian Victims of War comes into force on January 1st of 2024 in FBiH.