



Republic of Albania
COMMITTEE OF NATIONWIDE RECONCILIATION

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The speech of Mr. Gjin Marku, Chairman of the Committee of Nationwide Reconciliation, during the annual analysis of the Reconciliation Missionaries National Assembly and the latest reconciliation expedition

Dear Participants.

First, I want to thank you all for the hard work we were all engaged in this year's expedition which was one of the longest and most difficult we had had in years.

We have been involved, for many years now, in this volunteer and humanitarian mission based on the tradition, each time the duty called, day or night.

I would like to thank our honorable friends, and especially Ms. Nadire Cohen, who joined us in this difficult journey, days and nights, in the long and challenging roads not only inside Albania but as far as Tetove, Struge and Gostivar.

We are not alone, and we have never been alone in this humanitarian Endeavour because it is the duty of every Albanian not to be an observer of those whose lives are affected by the revenge and the blood feud phenomenon. This is our permanent contribution and obligation that will hopefully, somehow, bring the Albanian society to a normal life a life of harmony and unity.

The European Union, which invites us in its political organization, has abolished the death penalty and thus has exercised a profound vision and thought for the best of humanity. Unfortunately, in all the polls conducted in our country, Albanians together with their leaders are seeking the return of the death penalty; they consider the abolishment of death penalty to be the wrong course for Albanians.

The Committee of Nationwide Reconciliation has always been against this pervasive opinion amongst Albanians. We have been and will always be opposed because it shows Albanian's inability to find the right guidance that would lead them to the permanent prohibition of evil.

Albania and the territories of all Albanians are fertile lands where the tree of virtue has grown strong for generations, but together with the tree of virtue poisonous plants of hatred have sprouted, quite often cultivated by secret hands. It is our duty to uproot these poisonous plants for the sake of our future generations, so we can leave our children with a land where they can only cultivate trees that can produce fruits of virtue and happiness free from poisonous plants.

The work of the reconciliation missionaries has been highly appreciated and will always have the well-deserved gratitude of all Albanians, but I have to say that it is the duty of everyone to sacrifice when saving lives of innocent people becomes an obligation.

In every place we went we meet people who live through a lot of problems, tears and pain. This forces us to humble ourselves before those who hurt, to share their pain and be tireless in our efforts to end their agony and tears, knowing that we have done nothing more than a humane duty because it is a sacred obligation to share and listen to the ones who suffer from the pain and the feelings of revenge in their hearts; we should work hard to convince them that revenge would not ease their pain.

It is our responsibility to make it clear to them that blood feud killings never brought and will never bring any relief regardless of the circumstances under which they might have been executed. Pain, equal or more severe than the one that burdens you, cannot be cured by causing pain and tragedy to another human being. On the contrary, everything will improve if the pain and pride that prevents reasoning is forgotten, if an effort is made to bring happiness to the one waiting for your truce, for your forgiveness, for your hand. Then you have been able to transform your pain into a fruit of pride, of happiness for yourself and your family.

We live in a time when events that are taking our society to a ruinous path are revealed but we need to work hard to persuade all those who are following this path to awaken and change course. We should get organized so that we could stop the hand that cultivates the plant of death, bring an end to the culture of hatred, the revenge killings and encourage love for life and for the future of our children.

Unfortunately, the Albanian government has not been supportive of this sacrificial mission. We want to tell the Albanian government that it is only one principle which governs our work; to offer our country and our society a sublime sacrifice. We live in difficult times and if we harshly criticize bad governance, but we do not do this because of some hidden agenda or interests.

Our opponent position with the government has been and it will be unwavering regardless of who is in power because we want the voice of the needy and of those who are suffering hardships to be heard by the leaders who were elected by the people.

It was late at night, we were tired and exhausted after we returning in Krume from an 18 hour trip from Golaj of Hasi, a trip filled with meetings of families involved in blood feuds, it was then Adem Hyseni told us; "Now is the time to defend justice to the end!"

I do think about his wise words every day and believe that even a thousand years from now, there will always be righteous men and women who will fight for what is right; this is the reason why our nation was not annihilated because there have always been people like Adem Hyseni, sons and daughters who believed in justice. Each one of us should be governed by this precious principle because this is the motivation of our entire lives.

Today we are honored by the presence of Mr. Ramiz Zeka, honorary wise citizen, representative of the Islamic faith.

As a catholic, and the Chair of the Committee of Nationwide Reconciliation I am thankful to offer him my gratitude; I will refer to a verse of the Quran that he kindly showed us where the Almighty states: "...he that saves the life of an innocent human being will be the same as he had saved the life of all mankind".

Without the Bible or the Quran, for thousands of years, Albanians have been able to carve indisputable laws who stood the test of time and served mankind, and since we are in the

Christmas season celebrated by over a milliard people all over the world I wanted to quote the case of the apostle Peter asking Jesus a question..

“...Lord how many times is my brother to sin against me and am I to forgive him? Up to seven times?”

Then Jesus replied: “I say to you, not up to seven times, but, up to 77 times...”

Isn't this the most well-defined law against those who preach; “..eye for an eye and tooth for tooth..”?

Another shocking tale of a man murdering his brother describes Abel and Cain meeting after death. Walking in the desert and in the distance they recognized each other as they were both very tall. They were silent like tired men at dusk. In the sky a nameless star. In the light of the flames Cain sees the mark left by his stone on Abel's forehead and he drops the piece of food he was about to eat. Then he asks his brother whether he had forgiven him for his crime. Abel replies: “Did you kill me or did I kill you? I don't remember. But does it really matter? Both of us are here now, together like before”. Cain reflects: “Now I know you have truly forgiven me, because to forget is to forgive and to forgive is to forget!”

Well if we understand life, it will have a meaning only if we see it in the aspect of justice and when we love the others like we do love ourselves or more, when we sacrifice for the others. Otherwise the dark times when the man would kill his brother will be here. I do believe all of us here today should be proud of ourselves for the sacrifices and efforts we have made so far in this field.

Today, before we hear the report on the expedition and the problems and concerns raised therein I want to touch on a very concerning issue that is troubling to us all, that of the violence against the Albanian women, something that she has at no time seen in the history of this country because the Albanian man never thought of dominating her but only wanted to build a happy life with her, be fair with her and sacrifice for her.

The Committee of Nationwide Reconciliation treats the gender equality to be a very important national issue, not for the sake of getting integrated in the international scene like many phony politicians claim, but to preserve the dignified life of the Albanian woman inherited for thousands of years and generations because it was the freedom that made her proud to be an Albanian woman or girl, enjoying her rights and freedom, more than the man that would try to hinder or violate her independence.

The Kanun was quite strict with every so called man who dared to afflict woman's rights and freedom. And if he went further, if he dared to even touch her as much as with a finger for whatever reason, then this kind of so called man who would show his strength and bravery with a woman would be subjected to serious punishment. Unfortunately the Kanun has been misunderstood and misused because at times it has been misinterpreted as well. The real Albanian Kanun, the unwritten and uncollected one is still precious. I often recall a line from the art and literature of some time ago. In the true meaning of the word and as required by the Kanun of the mountains we should remind all those who are cowards that from the Mountains of Mirdite it was Lek Dukagjini who said: " You either treat a woman like a lady, as I say, or leave her alone, you are not fit to marry".

The present day Albanian man appears violent, dominating and coward in contrary to the tradition. The woman in the Albanian family, in the city and village, has been demoted to the role of the servant and not in the position of the lady of her house. The founding of the family code did not produce any positive results and it was ignored from the start. Although the level of

education for Albanian girls is high, unemployment, violence and humiliation remains a phenomenon that affects them in every walk of life regardless of their educational level.

The Albanian Government Strategy of 2007 - 2010, approved by the Council of Ministers, no. 913 19.12.2007, about the gender equality in decision-making and prevention of domestic violence, is simply an act formulated on paper and was not implemented. It has not worked so far, has not brought progress on the issue of gender equality on the decision making and neither has minimised the phenomenon of domestic violence.

The absence of women and girls participation in the decision making process was noted during the Local elections of May the 8th, 2011 while we were engaged in our two- month expedition during that election campaign.

During these elections the number of women and girls elected at the leading positions of the City Halls or Commune at City Hall Council and Commune Council was much lower than any other times.

In the local elections of 2011 no effort was made by the government and parliament to have a significant number of women candidates for mayors of municipalities, rather this number was reduced, although there was a concern of the international community and organisations of the civil society.

This is either because the Kanun is misunderstood by the political leaders who behave unfairly with women or they are cowards and cannot handle the wisdom and the ability of women to be fully engaged in parliament and governance.

I think that the people who should be the very first ones ashamed before the Kanun are Mr. Berisha and Mr. Edi Rama. We know they have a big problem because the auditoriums of their parties are occupied by businessmen who financially support their parties. But there is a solution to that too.

Often, the International Community appears to take the wrong position in regards to the political situation in the country and the contribution that they give as friends of the Albanian democracy; this is as a result of a misunderstanding of the tradition of the Kanun on their part, a tradition that enhances the message of the culture of law, of peace and of prohibition of any kind of violence. What has happened and is happening in the name of the Kanun is a violation of it, is in opposition with the customary law.

During the monitoring of the initiatives of the government and the ministries responsible for the implementation of the National Strategy on Gender Equality and preventing of domestic violence, the Committee of Nationwide Reconciliation has noticed that the violation of women is overlooked not only by the present political forces but by the society and the international community as well.

Quite often, in the Parliament, offensive language and degrading marks are used to address the family, women and girls; this is completely appalling and punishable by the Albanian tradition and the customary law. At present, a good indicator is the fact that more women are beginning to seek the assistance of the courts when their husbands resort to extreme behaviour. This is indeed to be welcomed.

In 36 districts of the country where the CNR has its working groups, we found that 85% of households in rural areas and 70% of households in the cities uphold the patriarchal mentality that of the man dominated family life which is a disgrace for the Albanian society.

Unfortunately, the domination of women, of sisters, or girlfriends is a tangible reality even within urban families, with young graduate students as well as with families of high economic, social and cultural level.

This has nothing to do with the Kanun which considers women equal, humanly dignified the same as men. Actually the Kanun considered unethical behaviour towards women to be not only a shameful but a punishable act as well.

Of course, in addition to the distorted patriarchal mentality the crisis and violence against women is also due to the poverty that the country is facing, which is minimised with demagoguery and propaganda by the Albanian government.

The irresponsible attitude of the representatives of the international community has played a negative role on the continuation of the damaging demagoguery that covers up the reality even though this crisis has brought stress and depression in many Albanian families and as a result has exposed children to tragedy and violence.

Contrary to the government's propaganda or the reports of the international bodies Albania has not seen economic growth it has only seen a dramatic decline of the economy. Suicide rates have reached all time high, shocking numbers, 30% of which are women, a phenomenon that did not exist even in the most difficult times for Albanians.

A disturbing number of those suicides are men drenched in debts that they borrow to play in casinos but are unable to pay back. The Committee of Nationwide Reconciliation has protested and has pleaded with the Albanian government and its state to ban casinos because of the tragic consequences they bring, but the government has strongly supported these kinds of activities in the capital and throughout the country.

The moral degeneration of members of the government and of the parliament has become a bad example and this is reflected in the breakdown of their families, divorce and even uncontrollable behaviour on the part of their children.

Most of the families whose husbands hold a senior position in the government or public administration have accumulated excessive wealth and they have become involved in uncontrolled recreation activities. Besides divorce these families often display hatred and denigration of spouses in the eyes of the public. I believe that we should speak up for this situation to change because it is too harmful for our children and future generations.

In my opinion this common concern should have its place in the report we are about to adopt.

Thank you.