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A Voice for Justice, Freedom, and Solidarity with Kosovo – Arnisa Morina

Thank you everyone for being here.

My name is Arnisa Morina. Today is not about politics.

Today is about standing in solidarity with the Kosovo Liberation Army (the KLA) and its former leaders convicted by the Kosovo Specialist Chambers at The Hague, and with every Kosovar who believes that our history, our suffering, and our struggle for freedom deserve to be heard.

For many of us, the KLA represents our people's struggle for survival and freedom in the face of repression and violence.

Regardless of your political beliefs or affiliations, **the history of Kosovo cannot be separated from the sacrifices of those who fought for freedom.**

Hashim Thaçi, Jakup Krasniqi, Kadri Veseli, Rexhep Selimi, and countless other members of the KLA, alongside our martyrs, veterans, and ordinary citizens of Kosovo, helped shape the course of our nation's history. Their sacrifices became part of the foundation upon which Kosovo's freedom and independence were built.

In 1999, my family and I were among the thousands of Kosovar refugees who found refuge in Canada through Operation Parasol. We will forever be grateful to Canada. Our gratitude also extends to NATO; for, without NATO's intervention, the fate of countless Kosovar Albanians would have undoubtedly been tragically different.

I stand before you today as a fellow Kosovar Albanian, as a former Kosovar refugee, as a lawyer in Canada, but most importantly, as a daughter whose father was killed in the Kosovo War.

On September 26, 1998, my father, Mehdi Morina, was executed by Serbian forces during the Gullobovc massacre. Of the fourteen men who were captured, one survived, and he shared the events leading up to the execution of thirteen Kosovar Albanian men, including my father.

In a documentary surrounding the Gullobovc massacre, the sole survivor, recalled details of my father's execution, that have remained with me throughout my life:

> *"They, the Serbian forces, brought us to the garden where the execution took place. Until the execution, our hands had to remain behind our heads. We were then lined up against the fence, laying flat on our belly, face down, with our hands behind our heads. The stick they used to beat us was a shovel handle. We lay there for two or three hours while they beat us and interrogated us.*

..each of us were told to turn around and we were shot at in the back, some several times, with no opportunity to escape."

Witnesses later visited the execution site to recover the bodies, and one of the witnesses recalled how "the pathway leading to the place where the men were killed was covered in the brain tissue of the victims."

Learning the circumstances of my father's execution instilled in me a deep source of passion for advocacy and justice.

To this day, I vividly remember as a little girl, I was maybe 5 years old riding my bike, and I would imagine what it would be like if my father was standing beside me, teaching me how to ride a bike. I remember watching my classmates being picked up by their fathers after school and wishing I could have that. And I remember the Father's Day activities in elementary school, when our teachers would tell us to draw a picture for our fathers as a gift, and I would sit there and draw a picture for my mother instead.

Those memories may seem small and insignificant to someone who has never experienced the loss of a parent, but for me, as a child, the longing for such simple moments that many take for granted, shaped my future.

I am a mother now as well. And one day, my 5-year-old daughter, looked at my father's picture hanging in my office, and she said ***"I wish your dad could come back alive one day so I can see him." And I said, "Me too."*** Because no matter how much time passes, a part of me will always be that little 5-year-old girl wishing her father was there beside her, teaching her how to ride a bike.

War does not only take lives. It takes birthdays, graduations, family memories, and generations of moments that will never happen. And that is why we are here today.
The pain and losses of Kosovar Albanians deserve to be acknowledged.

Kosovo's history cannot be confined to the judgement of a single courtroom, and the suffering of Kosovo and its people cannot be measured by the outcome of a single trial.

Kosovo's history has witnesses.

Approximately 1.5 million Kosovar Albanians were forcibly displaced from their homes. More than 13,500 people were killed, including over 1,100 children. Approximately 20,000 people were subjected to rape and sexual violence. Around 1,600 people remain missing, leaving families suspended between grief and hope, still waiting for answers, still searching for the remains of those they love, and still carrying the heavy weight of hope that maybe one day their loved ones will be found.

As a lawyer, I understand that justice is neither simple nor linear. Where is the corresponding measure of justice for the massacres, sexual violence, and genocide, committed against Kosovar Albanians by Serbian forces?

Some may ask, "What will this gathering today accomplish?" No, we are not going to change the Hague's verdict today. But what we are going to do, is stand together, to remind the world that

our suffering has not disappeared. **We are here today to demand accountability, and a to demand a justice for Kosovo and its people that is principled, impartial, and free from political pressure.**

I belong to a generation of Kosovar Albanians whose earliest years were marked by some of humanity's gravest tragedies: ethnic cleansing, mass killings, and other crimes against humanity. **We inherited wounds we did not create, grief we were too young to comprehend, and a history whose consequences continue to shape our lives.**

At same time, as a generation, we have also rebuilt our lives. We have crossed borders, established homes, pursued education, raised families, and contributed to the societies in which we now live, but we have also carried Kosovo and our history with us. Our resilience is evidence that despite our wounds, our generation has endured and continued.

I stand here as a daughter who lost her father, as a refugee who found a home in Canada, as a lawyer who believes in the principles of justice, and as a Kosovar Albanian who refuses to allow the suffering of the people of Kosovo to be forgotten.

My father, Mehdi Morina, cannot return. The years I lost with him cannot be restored. But his memory remains. Our history remains. And our voices remain.

We remember because forgetting would betray those we lost. We speak because silence would abandon those still waiting for justice.

We, the people of Kosovo, have suffered far too much to forget, sacrificed far too much to surrender, and endured far too much to allow our history to be told without our voices.

Let us remain united and unwavering in our pursuit of justice, for Kosovo’s martyrs, for our missing loved ones, for our veterans and survivors, and for our Kosovo.

Long live Kosovar Albanians and long live the Republic of Kosovo!