

Written Testimony of **Mr. Liri Loshi**

submitted before the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs
on “Kosovo’s Wartime Victims: The Quest for Justice”

April 30th, 2019

I was born in the village Pemishte of the Skenderaj municipality on August 20th, 1960. I worked as a general medical practitioner in Skenderaj and Runik from 1989 until 1999, when I decided to move to Canada with my family. During the war in Kosovo, I was working at a medical clinic in Runik where I would regularly tend to patients of all ethnicities, including Albanian and Serbian. As the conflict between the Serbian forces and the KLA intensified, the Serbian military and paramilitary forces were shelling the entire Runik area. People had no choice but to leave their homes and move to remote villages in the surrounding area to seek refuge from the Serbian attacks. One of these villages was Izbica.

My village, Pemishte, like many others, was burned down. I found myself without a home, without shelter for myself or my family. In June 1998, I went to a neighboring village called Lecnice. From there I went to Izbica and Turicefc, to live and work as a medical doctor.

In March 1999, the village Klladernice was shelled by Serbian forces that were stationed in Runik, which is only a few kilometers away from Klladernice. One of the shells hit a house and killed three people that were inside. The population of the village then gathered in the building of the elementary school to get cover from the shells.

On March 25th people started to concentrate in the Izbica Valley. By March 26th, thousands of people had gathered there. On the morning of March 27th, a friend of mine, Xhavit Dragaj, a dentist who I used to work with at a health station in Runik, asked me to help him and his family get out of Izbica. We could hear the Serbians shelling, and we knew that this was a clear indication that the Serbian forces were approaching Izbica. I drove Xhavit and his family in my car for about three or four kilometers to the village Tushile. This village had also become a gathering point for civilians.

When we arrived in Tushile, we found out that the village was overpopulated and the houses could not accommodate any more people. I stayed in Tushile until March 29th. People gathered in an open field and surrounded the area with white sheets to signal to the Serbian forces that they were unarmed civilians. There were thousands of people there, in the Tushile area, all of whom were civilians.

On March 29th, late in the evening, I left Tushile because I knew that the Serbian forces were approaching. I went to the village Kopiliq i Eperm, which is mid-way between Tushile and Izbica. While I was in Tushile, I talked with several women who were forced to leave Izbica with their children after they had been separated from their husbands. They told me that the Serbian forces had taken their husbands away in three groups. Shortly after they had been separated from the men, the women heard gunshots. This led them to assume that their husbands had been killed. However, they had not witnessed the killing with their own eyes, and therefore could not confirm it. Hence, I believed that it was necessary for me to go to Izbica myself in order to seek the truth.

The next day, on March 30th, I went from Kopiliq to Izbica. When I got there, I saw the bodies. It was clear that a massacre had occurred. Then, some people who had been living in the area and were

able to escape deep in the mountains guided me to the place where the massacred bodies had been scattered on the ground. There were three groups of bodies, a few hundred meters apart from one another. Each group had between 30 and 50 people. So even at first glance, you could tell that over 100 people had been killed there. 27 were counted in total.

Judging from their clothing and the shoes that they were still wearing, one could tell that these individuals had prepared for long travel and were likely refugees who had been fleeing from one place to another to save their lives. I saw bloodstains near the bodies and unmistakable signs of execution by gunshot. From the appearance of the wounds on their faces and bodies, I could tell that they had been shot from very close range. Only close-range fire could have caused such horrific damage to them. There was no doubt that all of these men had been brutally massacred.

After seeing the gruesome sight of these massacred bodies, I immediately looked for a camera to record them and to show the world what had happened in Izbica on March 28th, 1999. I found a man called Sefedin Thaci, who had hidden his camera underground, and asked him to come with me to film the bodies together. He agreed, and we started to film. On that same day, KLA members and civilians who were in the area got together to dig graves and bury the bodies, most of whom were their family members or relatives.

We were little over one kilometer away from the Serbian forces who, after committing this massacre, were now in the village Vojnik. As we were filming the bodies, three elderly people approached me and told me that they were among the wounded civilians who had survived the massacre. After we finished burying the bodies, Sefedin filmed me as I interviewed the three elders who described to us in their own words the horrific events that they had experienced. They told me how they were lined up and shot from close range by Serbian forces. However, they said that the blows which struck them did not cause critical damage to their bodies. In order to survive, they had to lay under the bodies of the victims that had been murdered and remain still until the Serbian forces left. Among these massacred bodies I identified three of my own cousins. They were three generations of men from the same family, Selman Loshi, his son Jashar Loshi, and his grandson Sami Loshi.

It took me approximately one month and a few attempts to get out of Kosovo and smuggle my tape to Albania. There, I was able to send the video out to the White House, NATO headquarters, the Hague Tribunal, and international media. I testified about the massacre that I had witnessed in Izbica during the trial of Slobodan Milosevic in 2002, and the trials of two other groups of Serbian officials who were tried in 2006 and 2009 for war crimes committed in Kosovo.

The massacre in Izbica has never been properly addressed. There are still so many Serbian criminals who have not been punished for the crimes that they committed against the civilian population in Kosovo in the 1990s. I urge the United States Congress to seek justice for the victims of war crimes and human rights abuses committed in Kosovo, by taking immediate action to address this matter.