

Written Testimony of **Ms. Ferdonije Qerkezi**

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

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On March 27th, 1999 twenty-three members of my family were present in my house.

I was there together with my husband Halim Qerkezi and my four sons Artan, Armend, Ardian and Edmond. Artan’s wife Arta was there, and so was her family. Her father Shpejtim Ymeraga, her mother Vlora, her grandmother Sevdije, her two sisters Fiona and Marigona, and her aunt Venera. Armend’s wife Miranda was there too. Kasim Qerkezi’s son Vegim was also with us, and so was Skender Dylhasi with his wife Dudije, and their son Murteza with his wife Edi, and their two-year-old daughter Genta. Our cousin Manduha was also there with two sons Fatos and Shpend.

Out of the twenty-three of us, eleven were men, including my youngest son Edmond who was only 14 years old, nine of us were women and three were young girls.

On March 27th, 1999 at approximately 12 o’clock, four policemen came into our house. Two of them came in from the main entrance, and the other two used the basement door. Once they were inside the house, one of them asked my husband Halim “Who are all these guests?”. Halim promptly began to gesture towards each person and explain his relationship to each of them. “This one is my brother’s son. This is Shpejtim Ymeraga’s family, they are my son’s in-laws. The other two families, Dylhasi and Jetishi, are my cousins.” he said.

The Serbian policeman turned to Halim and said “Everything is good. There are no refugees. You can all go in now.” That is exactly what we did.

Three hours later, the same policeman, Dragan Raxhiq, returned with his friends. They asked us to go outside again and stand by the basement doors. Then they asked for our ID cards. We all gave them our ID cards, except for Edmond because he was too young to have one. They took us and our ID cards back to the police station where we had to wait outside in the rain. After a full hour had passed, they told us that everything was ok and that we could go back to our house where they were going to protect us from NATO.

While we were on our way inside, the policeman ordered Artan to take our car out of the garage. Our car was a green Opel Kadett. Artan did as he was told and drove the car out for them.

Dragan Raxhiq was in the first basement with my husband Halim and Skender. He ordered a man to bring a table and two chairs in there for them. The rest of us were told to go to the second basement. While we were still in the first basement, the policemen ordered Halim to bring them some raki, a type of alcoholic drink. Halim told them that he doesn’t have any alcohol in the house, only fruit juices. Dragan Raxhiq was rather surprised and asked Halim “How come you don’t have any raki when you own a bar?” Halim responded, “I do have raki at the bar, but I do not keep any in my house.” The policeman proceeded to drink the juice that he was offered. Then Dragan asked me for coffee. I obliged and made them two coffees with a medium amount of sugar. Dragan gave the coffees back and asked for one sweetened coffee and another unsweetened one. While I was on my way back upstairs to make fresh coffees, I sighed. Dragan heard me and said, “Don’t be scared

mother.” Dragan then asked Ardian for water and told him that he was a good waitress. Ardian brought him the water.

As I was coming down the stairs with the new cups of coffee I overheard Dragan tell Halim “You Albanians, we need to cut your heads off.” Halim replied, “We are at your mercy, and you can do whatever you want with us.” Dragan stood up and checked the back door of the basement, locked it, and placed the key in his pocket. We stayed like this for two hours. Dragan and his friends gave our children chocolates and gave the women a 500 gram bag of coffee.

Dragan Raxhiq knew Myrteza Dylhasi, Skender’s son. He would constantly refer to Myrteza as “tzar” and wouldn’t give him a break. He would repeatedly tell Skender that a son like his is hard to find these days. When Myrteza came to the second basement, Edi’s wife asked: “Who is this guy and how does he know you?” Myrteza answered, “He is Dragan Raxhiq from Montenegro. He worked at the cultural center. He comes to my store and often takes food without paying for it saying that he is going to pay me next time he comes by.”

The first basement where Halim and Skender were still was quiet. Myrteza was with us in the second basement holding his daughter when he heard Dragan’s voice call out “Tzar, let go of the kid and come here.” He walked out with Myrteza and told him to leave the door open.

Then my husband Halim came to the second basement. Skender’s wife Dudije asked him “Mr. Halim, where did they go?”. Halim said “Yes, they left, and on the way out they told us not to be scared. They said that the police will keep an eye on us and will bring us flour so that we can cook for everyone, including the whole police station”.

A few minutes after we had all quietly gathered together in the second basement the same policemen came back in. This time they were wearing masks. They had the same uniforms on. We recognized Dragan from his eyes and the sound of his voice. They turned towards us and said “We are KLA. Do you love KLA? Do you love NATO? Do you love America?” Then, without changing the tone of their voice they said: “All the men, go outside!”

They proceeded to call all the men by their names: Artan, Armend, Ardian, Fatos, Shpend, Vegim, Shpetim, and Edmond. Fourteen-year-old Edmond was asleep. I woke him up and told him that he was being called. They had a list of names and they were looking for all the men.

Then they turned towards the women and children. They placed guns to our faces and asked us for gold. All the women took off their rings, necklaces, earrings, everything we had and gave it to them. The masked policemen filled a glass up with our gold. Then they turned to me and asked me for money. I gave them 500 DM. They placed a gun on Manduha’s chest and asked her for money too. She did not have any. They became angry and shot at the floor. The hole is still there, in our house. They turned to Dudije and placed the sharp end of a knife on her throat and told her that they were going to cut all the Albanians’ throats.

The other masked policemen approached Edi and said: “You either give us money, or we will kill your little daughter.” Edi told them “This is not my house and I do not have any money.” The policemen, who had placed a gun on the little girl’s chest, took it off of her and told everyone “You all have ten minutes to get your things ready and leave for Albania.”

The time was around 7:00 p.m. All the women with their children left the house. None of us knew where we were going. As we were walking, we decided to go into an apparent complex nearby. One of the owners, Mr. Qumil Haxhijanuzi, opened his door to us. Qumil told us that he had a mentally challenged son and that the police had also taken him a day before.

All nine of us women, together with our children, spent the night in Qumil's apartment. The next day, each of us took a different direction, except for Skender's wife Dudije and her daughter in law Edi. That day Qumil informed us that the police had released his son and that without being prompted his son had told him "Father, at the police station I heard that the police had brought in a lot of men with the last name Querkezi."

On May 7th, 1999 I went to Dragan Raxhiq's house with Kasim Querkezi and Nysrete Kumnova. When we opened the door, we saw his coworker Vuk Mirkoviq. Vuk turned to Kasim and said "Welcome Kasim." Kasim replied, "I have been looking for you." Vuk then told us to come inside. Once we were in, Dragan turned to me and asked me whether I remembered him. I responded "Yes!" Dragan asked, "Do you remember that I gave chocolate to the kids?". I replied "Yes" again.

Kasim had been a colleague of Dragan's before the war. They both worked at the cultural center. Kasim asked Dragan "Dragan, do you know where my sons and Halim and his sons are?" Dragan replied, "If I come by to your house this evening, I will bring you news. If not, then you will not know what happened to them for the rest of your life." He then asked us to stay for some coffee or raki. We did not stay.

Then Dragan showed us our keys and told us that he still has our car. Kasim said, "It is yours to keep if you just tell us where the men are?". Dragan turned towards me and asked me if I wanted the basement key back. I said, "Yes, I want it back." However, when Dragan took a look down at the pile of keys that he had, he could not remember which one was mine. Hence, he decided that he would bring it back when he figures out which one it was.

Dragan's last word to us were "Do you see what NATO is doing?", and then he told us that they had sent their families to Nish. Since we had never heard anything about them until then we only knew that he was from Montenegro. On June 14th, 1999 our town, Gjakova, was liberated. On that day, Kasim Querkezi and Muharrem Kumnova saw Dragan Raxhiq drive by in my husband's car, the green Opel Kadett.

Throughout this whole ordeal during the war, I Fredonije Querkezi together with my two daughters in law, Arta and Miranda, stayed in Gjakova from the day that we left our house. From March 27th, 1999 until June 14th, 1999. During this time we found shelter at my parent's house, Malush and Gjejlone Kumnova. The men of our family have been missing for 20 years. Dragan Raxhiq, Vuk Mirkoviq, and their friends are responsible for the tragedies of our families, Querkezi, Ymeraga, Dyhasi, and Jetishi.

I ask the United States Congress to address the human rights abuses and war crimes committed in Kosovo through direct action to demand justice for the victims.