

Dear Madam/Sir,

Herby, we are submitting the candidacy of Besima Borić for the *Anne Klein Women's Award*. We believe that Mrs. Borić meets the requested criteria with her outstanding performance in her social engagement and political life. She is a role model to women and girls in Bosnia and Herzegovina, inspiring them to make changes in their lives and the lives of people in their community by getting involved in the public sphere through politics and peace activism. In the following lines we will present a truly inspiring life path of Mrs. Borić.

Besima Borić is one of the rare politicians in today's BiH who is respected throughout the country. She has been working with the people and for the people; always ready to answer their calls and discuss different social and political issues in their communities. She is a woman with clear vision and extraordinary leadership skills and she has shown exemplary commitment for making gender equality, peace and democracy part of the social fabric of Bosnia and Herzegovina, on local and national level. She is one of the committed pioneers in women's political activism in Bosnia and Herzegovina, someone who made structural changes in the system and created solid foundation for further progress.

Besima Borić was born in 1950 in Jajce (Central Bosnia) where she spent her childhood and finished elementary school. Her family was nominally Muslim, and their cultural identity rests on the rich Muslim heritage, but they were secularized and declared the Yugoslav identity. She later accepted Muslim/Bosniac identity as her ethnic belonging.

In 1973 Besima married a Croat and moved to Algeria with her husband where she worked as a language teacher for Yugoslavian expatriates. After her return she settled in Vogošća, a suburban municipality of the City of Sarajevo, where she spent the war (1992-1995), under constant threat to her life due to her ethnic background, because Vogošća was occupied by the Army of the Republic of Srpska. She stayed in Vogošća to this day, being involved actively in a wide spectrum of social and political processes of the community. Not long after marrying for the first time, she became a young widow, with a baby girl. She managed to provide a comfortable life for her daughter, but married again, out of love, as always, following her heart, this time to a Serb, with whom she had a wonderful baby boy. Her family got divided with the beginning of the war, her children were in a safer location, in Croatia, for some time. After the war started, her marriage ended, but not due to ethnic differences, as she proudly stresses. When the war was over and her family was reunited, as a single mother with two children, Besima was motivated to build peace and to secure a place where they could live with all their identities. Her mixed marriage and family background guided her political affiliation and activism. She experienced hardships in 1990 when ethno-national identity (Bosniac, Serb, Croat) became the most important issue in BiH. After the war was over, and her children faced the horror of post-war, discriminative social surrounding, she became committed to her struggle for elimination of discrimination on any ground, for equal rights of all the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina, no matter what their ethnic and religious background, their gender, sexual orientation, education or social status was. Being a mother, she wanted peace for her children, for her family, and for her community which is something that inspired her to enter politics, and those values of multiculturalism and peace are what motivated her, as she proudly explained: "I would not allow anybody to make me uncomfortable about my identity and push me to the margins".

What makes Besima a genuine inspiration is her courage and vision to accomplish more. She is not satisfied with small achievements, someone who always looks for new challenges and problems to be solved, which is very easy to see from all the things she did through her involvement in politics and NGO sector.

In her political and NGO engagement she was focused on two main fields: gender equality and social policies, social protection in particular. These two wings: institutional and non-governmental with its dynamic and dialectic makes her well-informed and closer to citizens.

Besima is a politician who always analyses contexts attempting to understand multilayered challenges women face in politics from structural to cultural and personal. She was appointed many positions on different levels of governance: representative in the Municipality Council of Vogošća (1997), Representative in the House of Representatives of the Parliament of Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina(1998-2000), representative in the Assembly of Canton of Sarajevo (2002-2006), Minister of Labor and Social Policy (2001-2002), currently, she is a representative in the House of Representatives at the Parliament of Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and a President of the Committee for Labor and the social protection of the House of Representatives of the Parliament of Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and a member of the Committee for the displaced persons and refugees and the Commission for the gender equality. She held many position such as the president of the Municipality of Vogošća Board of Social Democratic Party (1996-2001), and currently she is the member of the Presidency and the Main committee of SDP BiH.

Believing that it is important to institutionalize women's human rights, from her first mandate in the Parliament of FBiH in 1998, she worked hard, and thanks to these efforts, *Gender Centers* in both the Federation of BiH and the Republic of Srpska were established. Besima was, also, one of the women that initiated the formation of the club of female parliament representatives.

Together with other women representatives she pushed for the enforcement of the *Gender Equality Law of BiH* (2003). This was the first state legal framework that resulted in the formation of the State Agency for Gender Equality - the highest state agency to represent BiH in the international organizations and institutions.

Besima believes that her work is meaningful and useful for her people and for her country, and she has shown that serving as an example to other politicians. She builds her own style of leadership which is not hierarchical and distant from people, but based on inner belief that human touch is important and that politicians should serve their fellow citizens who voted for them. Knowing that politics is a particularly difficult arena for a woman she paved the path for other women while making gender equality and social justice an integrative part of the social and political life. She has fought against discrimination on any ground. As a member of the Committee for gender equality, and a Working group, she has contributed to the enhancement of policies in the field of gender equality, family violence, protection of violence victims, gender analysis and, the law on high school and university education, the law on gender equality and the election law.

Besima has also enhanced the return of minority and other displaced persons to Sarajevo, as well from Sarajevo to the Republic of Srpska, which was a very important part of her peace building effort, the effort she took very personally. It was she who proposed the first Law on displaced persons and refugees in the Canton of Sarajevo and the law on social protection, the protection of civil war victims.

She has invested significant efforts into creation of the model of participation of the civil society (Union and NGO) in the decision making process and the law in the legislating bodies and the development of mechanism for that participation. Her focus has been directed at the development of the cooperation of women from political parties with NGOs.

Besima founded the *Gender Task Force Stability pact office in Sarajevo*, and established communication with institutions and mechanisms for equality of genders in BiH (2003-2006). One of the activities related to the *GTF SP* was coordinating the implementation of the *GTF project*, but she also took part as a participant in the following projects: the cooperation of parliament representatives in the region, political empowerment of Roma women, social dialog and women's rights, and other.

She worked on the OSCE project *Women in politics*, on the inclusion of quotas of the less represented gender in the election law, and she also organised women's organisations and mechanism in BiH as a reaction to the attempt of the Central Election Commission to decrease the women's quota during the changes on the *Election law* in 2005. The reaction was successful, and the quotas remained.

She is active in women's non-governmental organisations, being the founder and a long-time president of the association *Korak više (One step more)* in Vogošća. Apart from that, she ran the Women centre that gave psycho-social support to women as well as educational opportunities.

Besima has taken part in many international and national conferences on gender equality, and has given a full contribution to the development of women's movement and the enhancement of the equality policies in BiH and the region.

Another important achievement during her ministerial mandate was signing the *Protocol of cooperation between the Government of the Canton Sarajevo, and NGO AD Barcelona (today's Foundation of Local Democracy)* in 2001. Besima was the first minister that initiated and helped support the shelter for victims of domestic violence in Sarajevo, the first to propose the inclusion of the victims of violence as users of social protection in the law, which ended in success, and she was the first to mention the inclusion of women war rape victims in the laws and she advocated for their rights to be recognized.

Besima believes that working on human rights and gender equality is a life-long endeavour, and being a good and productive person is her personal first commandment. Looking back at her career, she finds her biggest accomplishment to be the trust of people she gained. Deserving this trust took years of working with patience and goodness. Besima's motto was being good and doing good. This helped her survive and make a better world for her family and her community.

We hope that you will recognize the importance of Mrs. Borić's work and achievements and award her with the Anne Klein Women's Award.

Kind regards,

This candidacy is submitted by :

Sarajevo Open Centre- Organisation dedicated to promoting of LGBT and women's rights, www.soc.ba

Association for Culture and Art CRVENA, <http://www.crvena.ba/>

Rights For All-human rights and advocacy organization of human rights, <http://www.rightsforall.ba>

Helsinki Citizens' Assembly Banja Luka, <http://www.hcabl.org/>

TPO Foundation Sarajevo- Trans cultural psycho-social educational organization, <http://www.tpo.ba>

Center for Empirical Research of Religion in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Women's forum Bratunac, -women's rights and advocacy organisation, www.forumzena.org