November 27, 2012

**Declaration of Bosniaks in North America regarding BIH census 2013**

The primary objective of the following Declaration is to classify the importance of the use of historic term Bosniak in light of the recent announcement of the 2013 Census in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The declaration was adopted at a round table event in Grand Rapids, MI on November 23, 2012.

 Even prior to the announcement of the 2013 Population Census of Bosnia and Herzegovina, many Bosniaks were confused regarding the terminology Bosnian, Muslim or Bosniak. This dilemma is a direct result of decades of exclusion and obstruction of Bosniaks from suing their national identity as Bosniaks. Such a ban was conducted so efficiently by the various oppressive regimes that our name (Bosniak) was forcibly wiped out almost entirely out of use. The roots of such coercion began with the Austro-Hungarian occupation, and continued through history during the formation and existence of Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, all the way to the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, imposed a declaration of Bosniaks as Serbs or Croats of the Islamic faith.

Bosniaks must not allow themselves to be misled in terms of religious and regional identity. An awareness of the historical importance of the proper orientation of Bosniaks is important for the census because it will significantly contribute to the fate of the Bosniaks and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Bosniaks must never forget that the most important goal of the aggression against the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina and genocide against its people, which is the case with most nationalist expansionist project, was to destroy the Bosniak people, and try to prove that Bosnia and Herzegovina does not have its own indigenous nation or ethnic group. By attempting to deny Bosniaks a right to their homeland, they are in fact claiming Bosnia exclusively for inhabitation of Serbs or Croats.

Bosniaks should never forget that the entity of Republika Srpska was created as a result of aggression and genocide, because the international community did not allow the legitimate Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina to complete its liberation campaign. From the very beginning of the implementation of the unjust Dayton agreement, Bosniaks have been politically marginalized in the smaller entity that is constantly being portrayed by Bosnian Serb leadership as the exclusive realm of the Serbs, a continuation of their aggressive genocidal policies. Today, Republika Srpska is the only place in Europe where Bosniaks, an indigenous group of people are being discriminated against, and denied basic rights to their nationality, language, and teachings in school about their own culture and culture.

Bearing in mind the need to preserve and develop the Bosniak culture and remember the crimes committed in the Bosnian war, as well as to raise awareness of the historic importance of the upcoming census when Bosniaks will, for the first time in recent history, have the opportunity to identify themselves as Bosniaks, this proclamation launches a campaign of public awareness and education of Bosniaks in the diaspora.

Starting from the following historical facts and current political reality and demographic composition in Bosnia and Herzegovina:

* Bosnia and Herzegovina, with its full historical, legal, social, ethnic, organizational and institutional structure is the home country of the Bosniak people
* The traditional Bosniak name binds the Bosniak people as an indigenous nation of Bosnia and Herzegovina to the territorial area of Bosnia and Herzegovina along with its legal system of government and its community,
* Bosniaks were victims of genocide and aggression perpetrated by their neighbors. This has resulted in a need to build on the culture of remembrance and prevention of genocide as a way towards a better Bosnia and Herzegovina and a better Bosniak future. The main goals of such culture are to honor the victims of genocide and aggression prosecute the perpetrators of these heinous crimes, and to seek justice for those victims of the war crimes.
* The Bosnian language is the most fundamental bridge of mutual understanding of Bosniaks as an independent nation and a connection between Bosniaks from other states outside of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

We urge the following actions be taken:

* Bosniaks fully participate in the 2013 Census in BiH and declare themselves as Bosniaks, whose native language is Bosnian.
* Bosnian-Herzegovinian Muslims declare themselves as Bosniaks, because 'Muslim' is a religious affiliation not a national or ethnic category. Members of this category must declare themselves as Bosniaks, whose native language is Bosnian, and religion is Islam.
* All those who primary identify themselves as Bosnians and Herzegovinians must also declare their identity as Bosniaks because it is one of only three constituent ethnic groups officially recognized by the Dayton Constitution. Demographic breakup of Bosniaks to Bosnians or Herzegovinians only serves those who want to divide and waken Bosnia-Herzegovina and Bosniaks.

These essential components of the Bosniak existence have effective prevented a collective amnesia among the Bosniak people of their own unique national identity and culture. Bosniak collective memory is firmly established through the return to the original, ancient, ethnic Bosniak name as a legitimate identity of the entire nation.

Only if our people accept the Bosniak nationality and Bosnian language as their mother tongue, will the census be of historic significance for Bosniaks and for Bosnia and Herzegovina.

A firm commitment of all Bosniaks to maintain and protect the use of their own unique identity, language, religion and culture will be enough to prevent any abuse and manipulation in the upcoming census.

Signatories of the Declaration

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