**February 13, 2014**

**Open letter addressed to the President of the Republic of Croatia, Dr. Ivo Josipovic, regarding his Chief Analyst and Special Coordinator, Dr. Dejan Jovic, and this man’s denial of genocide in Bosnia-Herzegovina.**

Dr. Ivo Josipovic

President of the Republic of Croatia

Office of the President of the Republic of Croatia

Pantovčak 241

10000 Zagreb

Croatia

February 12, 2014

Dear President Josipovic,

Please allow me to introduce myself. My name is Suzana Vukic. I live in Montreal, Canada, where I was born and raised. I am a woman of Croatian heritage. In addition, I am a member of The Institute for Research of Genocide Canada (IGC) - of their managing board, as well as their International Expert Team Council. I am alarmed concerning recent news from the IGC suggesting that your own Chief Analyst and Special Coordinator, Dr. Dejan Jovic, is a man who denies that genocide took place in Bosnia-Herzegovina during the war, and that he supports the ideology of a Greater Serbia.

Before I go on, let me explain a bit more about myself. I am employed as an educator in a readaptation centre, and I work with adults with intellectual disabilities and autism. I also write a column for a local weekly newspaper, the Vaudreuil-Soulanges Gazette (formerly known as The Hudson/St.Lazare Gazette). And for over four years, I have devoted a great deal of my writing to the Bosnian War and Genocide. While I was heartbroken to see war break out in Croatia in 1991, I found it far more horrifying to observe the barbarism that began to unfold in Bosnia the following year.

I have no direct connection to Bosnia in terms of ancestry. My parents come from Kali, a village on Ugljan Island, near Zadar. Regardless, my conscience dictated that I dedicate a great amount of my time and energy to Bosnia and her people - namely, the victims and survivors of the war.

As a result of my research and writing, I have had the opportunity to learn so much about what took place in Bosnia during the war. I have also had a chance to meet and connect with many Bosniaks who have survived the war and who have lived through what one woman that I know describes as “Golgotha”.

This experience has been a veritable journey for me. I had the chance to meet Professor Emir Ramic, President of the IGC, when I went to Toronto to join this city’s Bosniak community for their Srebrenica Genocide Commemorative Silent March and Ceremony in July, 2010. As a result of my writing and activism, I had the honour of being invited to become a member of the IGC by Prof. Ramic, shortly after this trip.

Ever since then, I have had countless opportunities to connect with survivors of the Bosnian war. I have met people who survived concentration camps - places like Omarska, Manjaca, and yes, Dretelj as well. I now know survivors of the siege of Sarajevo, as well as individuals who survived the ethnic cleansing of their hometowns - at the cost of losing their homes forever. I have met adults who have childhood memories of coming under direct sniper or artillery attack, or of being forced to flee their hometowns. I have met individuals - women and men - who survived wartime rape (some as children). I also know people who witnessed the murder of members of their own family.

In July, 2012, I travelled to Bosnia. At the beginning of my trip, I participated in the Srebrenica Peace March - a three-day trek on foot that commemorates, in reverse, the path taken by Bosniak men in an attempt to escape death at the hands of Bosnian Serb forces led by General Ratko Mladic (who, as you are aware, is now on trial for war crimes at The Hague). The day after the Peace March ended, on July 11, 2012, I went to Srebrenica-Potocari, where I attended the common burial for 520 men, out of the 8372 who were killed in the Srebrenica Genocide in July, 1995.

While in Bosnia, I spent a great deal of time working with Bakira Hasecic, President of the Association Women Victims of War (Udruzenje Zene Zrtve Rata), an organization that provides support to women and men who were raped or sexually violated during the war, collects their testimonies and actively pursues war criminals. Mrs. Hasecic, along with members of her family, lived through wartime rape (she is the woman mentioned earlier who describes the Bosniak wartime experience as “Golgotha”).

Thanks to Mrs. Hasecic, I had a chance to meet survivors of mass and systematic wartime rape from virtually all corners of this nation. It is important to note that this organization provides support to victims of all backgrounds, and also pursues war criminals from all different ethnic groups.

As a result, I had the opportunity to meet and familiarize myself with the stories of a variety of different survivors of wartime rape. I travelled to Visegrad, where I heard the story of a woman held in a concentration camp (the former Hasan Veletovac primary school) and raped daily in front of her parents. I went to Mostar, where I met two Bosnian Croat women who were raped during the war (one of them was 13 when it happened to her).

I also had the chance to become well acquainted with a Bosnian Serb woman from Visegrad who was held under house arrest and raped by local Serb chetnik paramilitaries. She was targeted because of the fact that her husband was Muslim.

In March, 2013, I was invited by Professor Ramic to deliver a lecture in Toronto on the Bosnian War and Genocide, for the Genocide Memorial Week event hosted by the organization Canadians for Genocide Education (CGE), featuring a case study of the former Yugoslavia. I had the unique honour, as a Canadian-Croatian woman with no Bosnian heritage, of being asked to represent Canada’s Bosniak community, and this group’s wartime experience, at this event.

My Bosnian journey continues to this day.

Given my experience and perspective, I was troubled to learn, through my trusted colleagues at the IGC, including Professor Emir Ramic and historian Marko Attila Hoare, of some of the views expressed by Dr. Dejan Jovic, your Chief Analyst and Special Coordinator.

Dr. Jovic has written a glowing review of a book written by the “academic” Dr. David Gibbs: *First Do No Harm: Humanitarian Intervention and the Destruction of Yugoslavia,* published in 2009.In this book, Dr. Gibbs states the following (among other contentious points):

* He denies that genocide took place in Srebrenica in July, 1995, at the hands of the Bosnian Serb army and places the blame for this event on the Bosniak victims from the area;
* He accuses the Bosnian government of shelling its own citizens in Sarajevo in order to gain international support;
* He claims that the western media needlessly exaggerated the crimes committed by the Serb armies;
* He claims that reports of atrocities committed in Serb-run concentration camps were exaggerated;
* He views Slobodan Milosevic as a champion against NATO expansion who fought for the preservation of Yugoslavia;
* He holds an extreme anti-Bosnian and anti-Croatian viewpoint, but upholds the ideology of a Greater Serbia.

In addition to supporting the work of this genocide denier, Dr. Jovic has also expressed some troubling viewpoints in his own book, *Yugoslavia: A State that Withered Away,* published in 2003:

* Dr. Jovic describes chetniks as a strong, pro-Yugoslav resistance movement;
* He sees Slobodan Milosevic as a Yugoslav nationalist, loyal to Tito’s legacy, and as a man who fought against anti-state ideology and anarchy;
* He views the aggression of the Yugoslav People’s Army on Croatian soil as well-intentioned, and claims that the JNA was dragged into war;
* He claims that Yugoslavia fell apart as a result of a weak, inefficient government and domestic, internal forces;

Before I go any further, I must pause for a moment to ask a question of you, President Josipovic: why is this man, Dr. Dejan Jovic, sitting in your office and acting as your right-hand man?

In a recent article that I read concerning Dr. Jovic, it was suggested that this man does not have a real sense of loyalty and allegiance to Croatia because he is, in fact, a Yugoslav at heart. But I beg to differ: Dr. Jovic is not a Yugoslav; he is a chetnik. And as such, it would be categorically impossible for him to desire anything other than the complete destruction of Croatia (and Bosnia as well), in the interests of an ethnically pure Greater Serbia.

An individual who occupies the position of the Chief Analyst and Special Coordinator to the President of the Republic of Croatia must have one allegiance, over and above all others - to Croatia and her people. It is a tremendous conflict of interest to have a chetnik sitting in your office, or an individual who is nostalgic for the days of Yugoslavia (and it is ultimately pointless to cling to the days of the old Yugoslavia because, as Dr. Jovic points out in his book title, this state bit the dust a long time ago).

Recently, the IGC wrote to you, pointing out facts that I have mentioned above, and how inappropriate it is to have Dr. Jovic sitting in your office. The signatories in IGC’s letter include 14 different organizations and associations, from Bosnia and outside of the country. Among them are the association Women Victims of War (Udruzenje Zene Zrtve Rata), as well as organizations dedicated to protecting the rights of concentration camp survivors.

In response to the concerns raised by the IGC and other signatories, Dr. Jovic has gone on a media rampage in which he has slandered all of the above organizations, and the individuals connected to them, in the most malicious manner possible. In his recently published article appearing in the online journal autograf.hr, Dr. Jovic refers to these organizations as “…marginal and completely irrelevant associations from the Bosniak diaspora….”. In the same article, Dr. Jovic goes one step further and calls them “…extremists who are not interested in preserving peace in this country, nor in the wider region, but instead desire some sort of a new war, in which they would be able to realize the goals that they were not able to accomplish in the previous war.”

Dr. Jovic considers himself to be an anti-war humanitarian. Yet with his published words, he is clearly and irrefutably demonstrating his deep disdain for individuals who have suffered through some of the worst savageries of the Bosnian War and Genocide. Dr. Jovic is calling these people extremists, and implying that they bear responsibility for the harm that was done to them. He is accusing them of working to promote strife and warfare in and outside of Bosnia. And he also clearly blames them for the war that took place in Bosnia from 1992 to 1995.

President Josipovic, I beg of you to carefully consider the words coming from your top advisor, so that you may understand how truly filthy and shameful it is to have a man like this sit in your office and exert his influence over you!

The people who Dr. Jovic insults and slanders include those who have survived not only ethnic cleansing, but some of the worst brutalities of the Bosnian war. They include concentration camp survivors - people who were beaten, tortured, sexually violated and subjected to the worst sadism imaginably (for the glee and merriment of their captors). They include survivors of mass and systematic wartime rape - women (and men) who were gang raped and humiliated by soldiers on a daily basis, as well as those who were forced to watch their own children (or other family members) get raped. They include people who survived the Srebrenica Genocide. And they also include people who have had a good portion of their family (near and extended) get killed or go missing, never to be seen or heard from again.

How is it possible that Dr. Jovic can have such deep contempt for these people and what they have been through? He repeatedly brings up the fact that most of the individuals connected to the signatory organizations in IGC’s letter are from the diaspora, that they do not live in Bosnia - and claims that they are therefore irrelevant.

This man is conveniently choosing to ignore the fact that these people live in the diaspora because they were ethnically cleansed out of Bosnia during the war. This was made possible thanks to the Serbian chetnik armies and paramilitaries who were working to create a Greater Serbia, cleansed of all non-Serbs. They were highly successful in their goals, thanks to the resources provided to them by the Yugoslav National Army - which Dr. Jovic praises so profusely.

It would also be good for Dr. Jovic to keep in mind that Bosniaks who were ethnically cleansed out of their homes and villages have found it very difficult, if not categorically impossible, to return to their homes - especially in the Republika Srpska entity - even though the Dayton Accord is supposed to guarantee the safe and unhindered return of displaced individuals to their homes.

Dr. Jovic’s stance demonstrates how dangerous it is to hold onto the belief that, during the Bosnian war, “all sides committed atrocities, and all sides suffered”. For while there may be some truth to this statement, it almost has the effect of covering up the harsh reality: Serbs are responsible for at least 90% of the atrocities committed during the Bosnian war (according to CIA estimates). And although individuals from all sides did suffer during the war, the greatest victims of this conflict are Bosniaks, who faced total annihilation as a group, from the very beginning of the war right up until its end.

Those who attempt to “equalize” the blame for the Bosnian war seek to deflect responsibility for the war away from those who committed the bulk of war crimes, and ultimately to minimize the harm that was done to victims. Dr. Jovic and those of his ilk would have us believe that the Bosniak victims of the war - people who still bear scars on their souls - are actually bloodthirsty, war-mongering murderers who bear responsibility for the war - and ultimately for the break-up of Yugoslavia. But this is nothing more than a huge lie, and it will not work. The only thing that this accomplishes is to insult and do further harm to the victims of the Bosnian War and Genocide.

Dr. Jovic would also have us believe that the belated Slobodan Milosevic, former President of Serbia and Yugoslavia, is nothing more than a really nice guy who never had anything but the best of intentions for all of the people of the former Yugoslavia, and sought to preserve peace and unity in this nation. That is a somewhat surprising viewpoint, considering that Time Magazine, in 1992, named Milosevic the “Butcher of the Balkans”. We all know that this man bears responsibility for the break-up of Yugoslavia, in seeking to incite ethnic hatred and encourage fellow Serbs to create an ethnically pure Greater Serbia. We also know that Milosevic died in prison at The Hague, while being tried on charges of war crimes and genocide in the wars against Croatia, Bosnia, and Kosovo.

This begs the question: why exactly is Dr. Jovic, your Chief Analyst and Special Coordinator, attempting to rehabilitate Slobodan Milosevic?

As a woman of Croatian descent, I find it difficult to write these words to you. Although I was born and grew up abroad, I have always maintained a connection to the land that my parents come from. I have taken quite a few trips to Croatia, from early childhood onwards. I have, throughout my life, appreciated many of the fine things about Croatia: the land and her people; the beautiful coastline and Adriatic sea, and the many islands that fall somewhere in between; the rich cultural, culinary and naval traditions of the Zadar region; and of course, the olive groves and rocky soil that form the basis of island living.

These are all good and positive aspects of Croatia - the ones that I would rather focus on. But of course, I realize that one cannot overlook the bad, either.

I’ll never forget in the early part of 1991, before war broke out in Croatia, when I heard news of twelve Croatian police officers who had been ambushed and killed in their station by Serb forces, and how all of these men were found with their eyes gouged out. I remember the sense of horror that this left me with, and realized how ominous this was for Croatia. I am certain that there was not a single Croat anywhere in the world who was not deeply affected by this barbarity.

I also look back at another event that occurred during roughly the same period, 23 years ago: the meeting in March, 1991, between Croatian President Franjo Tudman and Slobodan Milosevic in Karadordevo, on Serbian soil, where the two discussed carving up Bosnia between Serbia and Croatia.

Croatians will forever have to bear the burden of this disgrace on our collective conscience: we all woke up one morning 23 years ago and realized that Croatia would soon be facing a war of aggression from neighbouring Serbia. Being fully aware of this, our president went to meet with our aggressors *in their country* to discuss joint efforts to do even worse harm to another nation - Bosnia - and her people.

As a Croat, I am deeply ashamed of this event. I also believe that few Croats in the world are capable of accepting the fact of this meeting and the calamitous effect that it had on Bosnia - one that continues to this day. Few of my people are able or willing to accept the fact that Croatia and Croatians played not only the role of victim and hero during the Bosnian War, but also that of aggressor.

And while I, like many others, would prefer to think only about the positive side of my ancestral nation, I must admit that there are plenty of things about Croatia that make me feel ashamed, especially with regards to the Bosnian War: Dretelj, Heliodrom, Ahmici, Mostar, among others. I am ashamed about the fact that to this day, there are forces at work in and outside of Bosnia and Croatia promoting a “Third Entity” within Bosnia, for Croats - as if this country has not suffered enough already by being divided in two.

I am also ashamed of Croatia’s Nazi past during World War II. I am ashamed of Jasenovac. I am deeply troubled and embarrassed that the fascist Ustasha movement continues to be popular - in and outside of Croatia.

Right now, however, what embarrasses me the most is the fact that a Serbian fascist chetnik is sitting in your office, as your Chief Analyst and Special Coordinator.

President Josipovic, I realize that you are well aware of the difficulties that Croatia faces with its youth and general population identifying so strongly with the Ustasha fascist ideology. I agree that this is a serious problem that must be addressed and dealt with. But how do you expect to do this effectively when your own top advisor, Dr. Dejan Jovic, attempts to rehabilitate the Serbian chetnik fascist movement? What sort of example are you giving your own people? This is something that will anger and confuse your population. The Croatian people will see this as hypocrisy. And in the end, this will only make them cling to their chosen beliefs and ideals more strongly, out of spite towards you and your chief analyst.

In his articles targeting and slandering the IGC and other signatory organizations, Dr. Jovic states that as an academic, he has the right and the freedom to discuss any subject of his choosing, in whatever manner he desires. He uses this argument to justify portraying Slobodan Milosevic as a decent, respectful man, and the chetnik movement as a positive, unifying force for all parts of the former Yugoslavia (as opposed to the murderous, fascist, pro-Serb organization that we all know it to be).

I would like to ask this question of Dr. Jovic: Would it be alright if I, under the guise of “academic”, were to write a paper or article attempting to rehabilitate the Ustasha movement, or Ante Pavelic, the leader of Croatia’s World War II Nazi Puppet regime? Would it be acceptable for me to attempt to minimize Jasenovac, the Ustasha-run World War II concentration camp? No, I am certain that this would not be acceptable.

Likewise, Dr. Jovic cannot hope to utilize the veneer of scholarly legitimacy to justify his own genocide denial - or that of any other “academic”.

As a member of the Croatian diaspora, I am certain that Dr. Jovic, would be quick to dismiss me and label me “irrelevant”, in the same manner as he did with members of the Bosniak diaspora. It would perhaps do this man some good to realize that there are reasons why my parents, like so many others, ended up leaving Croatia during the years of communist Yugoslavia.

My parents lived through World War II as children. While I was growing up, my mother told me many stories about what life was like during those days. Their village - Kali - was partisan. Consequently, reprisals from occupying Italian fascist forces were severe. Kali was often bombed. People lived in terror and often sought refuge in other towns and islands nearby.

Two of my paternal uncles fought with the partisans during WWII. One of them, Berislav Vukic, fought not only in Kali and the Zadar region, but all over the territory of the former Yugoslavia, in places like Bosnia, Herzegovina, Sandzak, and Srijem, among others.

Uncle Bere, who remained a Yugoslav Army officer after the war, was credited (by none other than Tito) with displaying extraordinary bravery at the Battle of Sutjeska in eastern Bosnia during WWII, where the partisans fought a decisive and victorious battle against fascism and Nazism. His outstanding courage at the front lines in Srijem has also been noted.

My parents and their fellow villagers suffered greatly during WWII, especially owing to their steadfast commitment to the fight against fascism and Nazism. Nonetheless, it was clear to my parents after the war, during the period when the nation was being rebuilt, that there was no place for them in Yugoslavia, this nation of brotherly unity and love.

They left the country, along with many others - most of them escaping in droves for the new world. There was no place for them in their own nation, and no future that promised anything other than a life of poverty and oppression.

Yugoslavia, quite simply, was never a country created for the good and prosperity of Croats - or anyone else other than the Serbs. It was a Serbian hegemony, with this one group’s dominance clearly established over all others. It was an artificial state, ultimately doomed to fail.

And while I’m certain that Dr. Jovic would be quick to dismiss me as an irrelevant member of the diaspora, in the end, he will never succeed in stifling my voice, any more than he will succeed in making me forget who I am and what my roots are.

And by the same token, Dr. Jovic will never be able to silence Bosniak victims and survivors of the war - whether they be individuals living in Bosnia or in one of the diaspora communities.

President Josipovic, it has only been a couple of decades since the end of the wars following the breakdown of the former Yugoslavia. While Croatia is still struggling to recover fully, Bosnia is not doing as well. Both nations ought to work together in a spirit of cooperation in order to break free from the shackles of the past. Croatia now has the opportunity to redeem itself from the less than noble aspects of its history.

However, this cannot be possible in a climate of hatred and distrust that will surely be the product of your Chief Analyst’s rhetoric of genocide denial. Please consider this carefully. It would be very damaging for you to keep this man in your office.

I would like to see a future of growth and prosperity for Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, as well as all of the nations of the former Yugoslavia. I envision a world where each one of these can live side by side with the other in harmony, without fear of renewed warfare.

Do we have the courage to create this future?

Most Respectfully,

Suzana Vukic

Columnist

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