



January 9, 2015

Mr. Valentin Inzko  
 High Representative  
 The Office of the High Representative  
 Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Dear High Representative Inzko,

We are writing to express our concern about the intention of the authorities in Višegrad to demolish the Pionirska Street house. The Pionirska Street house fire that occurred on June 14, 1992, was one of two incidents in which approximately 60 civilians, including women and children, were burned alive. The second incident took place in the Bikavac settlement on June 27, 1992. The ICTY *Judgment*, which convicted the perpetrators of these crimes, observed that:

"the Pionirska street fire and the Bikavac fires exemplify the worst acts of inhumanity that one person may inflict upon others. ...these horrific events remain imprinted on the memory for the viciousness of the incendiary attack, for the sheer callousness and cruelty of herding, trapping, and locking the victims in the two houses, thereby rendering them helpless in the ensuing inferno, and for the degree of pain and suffering inflicted on the victims as they were burned alive."<sup>1</sup>

Moreover, as part of its Sentencing of the perpetrators for the crimes at Pionirska Street house, the Court took "the gravity of the offence" into account, referring to the particular gravity of the "monstrous mass killings."<sup>2</sup> The Court considered as well the extreme vulnerability of the victims, "who had been "rendered helpless," victims who included "a seventy-five year old woman" and "six children between the ages of two and four years old, and a two-day-old infant."<sup>3</sup> In its related "Discussion and findings" the Court asserted that:

"By burning the victims and the houses in which they were trapped, Milan Lukić and the other perpetrators intended to obliterate the identities of their victims and, in so doing, to strip them of their humanity. The *families of victims* could not identify or bury their loved ones. ... *There is a unique cruelty in expunging all traces of the individual victims which must heighten the gravity ascribed to these crimes.*"<sup>4</sup>

The Court proceeded to emphasize the perpetrators' "depravity" in their efforts to kill the victims "in a way calculated to cause the maximum amount of suffering."<sup>5</sup>

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In Višegrad today, the Bikavac house has indeed been entirely obliterated, and the Pionirska Street house is the only remaining evidence of these horrible crimes. The Pionirska Street house serves, in its very existence, as the only memorial to the victims. Unfortunately, it seems to be the official policy in Republika Srpska to deny crimes against humanity and genocide, and to suppress the cultural practice of mourning and memorialization for the victims. The plan to demolish the Pionirska Street house confirms this official policy. If the authorities are permitted to demolish the Pionirska Street house, then their genocide denial in Republika Srpska will have attained to new levels of depravity.

In the face of such efforts to erase the traces of the crime, Mrs. Bakira Hasečić, President of the Association of Women Victims of War, has attempted to restore the Pionirska Street house in order to preserve the memory of the victims. However, as a result of her heroic efforts, Mrs. Hasečić has been investigated for "illegal construction" and for crossing a "red tape," with which the authorities encircled the house to forbid access to the property. Mrs. Hasečić was persecuted and victimized during the genocide from 1992-1995, and now, as she resists genocide denial, she is being persecuted once again. Thus, it would seem that the perpetrators, who carried out the genocide in 1992, are succeeding once again in the intimidation and persecution of Bosniaks and non-Serbs, and in the destruction civilian homes. Word has reached us that all final appeals to prevent the demolition of Pionirska Street house have been exhausted.

On December 9, 2014, Al Jazeera Balkans published an article by Professor David Pettigrew, in which he reported on remarks that you made in Prague on October 30.<sup>6</sup> We found your remarks to be quite encouraging when you described genocide denial as "unbelievable," and when you referred to the glorification of war criminals in Republika Srpska as simply "unacceptable," and as being equivalent to "hate speech." You insisted, moreover, that Bosnia and Herzegovina needed to enact laws against genocide denial and hate speech.

In addition, Professor Pettigrew stated in his article that, on March 18, 2014, he crossed the "red tape" that forbids access to the Pionirska Street house in solidarity with Mrs. Hasečić and in order to respect and honor the memory of the victims of the crime. Further, in the same article, Professor Pettigrew invited you to join him in crossing and defying the "red tape" at the Pionirska Street house in the sense that the "red tape" is a "red line" of genocide denial, hate speech, discrimination, persecution, psychological intimidation and dehumanizing exclusion. Pettigrew wrote: "Let us cross the red line together in remembrance of the victims, in solidarity with the survivors, and in support of human rights."

Mr. High Representative, we ask you to accept Professor Pettigrew's invitation to defy the red line of genocide denial so as to preserve Pionirska Street house in remembrance of the victims and also to protect Mrs. Hasečić from further persecution. The situation in Višegrad is indeed dire, and we are seeking your support and intervention now especially because of your recent remarks in Prague. We ask you to demonstrate the moral leadership befitting your position and to intervene before it is too late. We implore you take whatever administrative action is necessary and is in your power to prevent the destruction of the house and to resist genocide denial.

Approximately one year ago we proposed that you declare such atrocity sites as federal or national property such that the survivors would be empowered to create memorials and

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commemorate the genocide free of interference, denial and the suppression of the truth. Such protected national memorial sites could be established on analogy with the Potočari Memorial Center and Cemetery, which was established by the Office High Representative in memory of the victims of the Srebrenica genocide. With the impending demolition of the Pionirska Street house, we believe that now is the time to move forward with such an initiative for Višegrad, Prijedor, Foča, and other "places of pain"<sup>7</sup> where survivors have been prevented from mourning and memorializing the victims.

Thank you for your kind consideration.

Sincerely,

Sanja Seferović-Drnovšek, J.D., M.Ed.,  
Chairperson, Bosnian American Genocide Institute and Education Center (BAGI)  
Member, Illinois Holocaust and Genocide Commission

*with*

Prof. Emir Ramić, Chairman,  
Institute for the Research of Genocide, Canada (IRGC);

Prof. Dr. Rasim Muratović, Director,  
Institute for the Research of Crimes Against Humanity and International Law, University of Sarajevo;

Prof. Dr. Senadin Lavic, President,  
Bosniak Cultural Association "Renaissance";

Ajla Delkic, Executive Director,  
Advisory Council for Bosnia and Herzegovina;

Mirsad Duratovic, President,  
Association of Detainees "Prijedor '92";

Satko Mujagic, President,  
Platform Bosnia and Herzegovina, umbrella organization of Bosnian associations and foundations in the Netherlands.

## Notes

1. *International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, Judgement, Milan Lukić & Sredoje Lukić* (IT-98-32/1-T) "Višegrad", Trial Chamber III, §1061, July 20, 2009, accessed January 4, 2015, [http://www.icty.org/x/cases/milan\\_lukic\\_sredoje\\_lukic/tjug/en/090720\\_j.pdf](http://www.icty.org/x/cases/milan_lukic_sredoje_lukic/tjug/en/090720_j.pdf)

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2. *Ibid*,

3. *Ibid*, §1064.

4. *Ibid*, §1062.

5. *Ibid*, §1063.

6. Inzko, Valentin. "Panel Presentation and Discussion." "Conference on "European Integration of the Western Balkans" Council for International Relations in Cooperation with Ministry of Foreign Affairs Czech Republic, Prague. Speech, October 30, 2014, accessed January 4, 2015, <http://www.rmv.cz/cz/detail-clanku/integrace-balkanu-do-evropske-unie-mezinarodni-konference/#.VFkrmUv0gTN>

7. Hariz Halilovich, *Places of Pain: Forced Displacement, Popular Memory and Trans-Local Identities in Bosnian War-Torn Communities*. New York. Berghahn 2013.