**Srebrenica: Twenty years later**

On July 11, 2015, Bosnia and Herzegovina will commemorate the 20th anniversary of Genocide in Srebrenica. This year 136 newly identified bodies will be buried in the memorial cemetery Potocari, near Srebrenica. So far, 6,930 victims have been identified, while the difficult process of unearthing and identifying the remains of the rest, approximately one thousand people, continues. The Hague’s International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia ruled in 2004 that the massacre of the enclave’s male inhabitants constituted genocide, a crime under international law. The ruling was also upheld by the International Court of Justice in 2007.

General Ratko Mladic, the Bosnian Serb military leader entered Srebrenica on July 11, 1995 and stated publicly that, "We give this town to the Serb nation as a gift. The time has come to take revenge on the Turks in these parts after the uprising against the *Dahije*.” His call for revenge was a historic one; for revenge against Turkish Rule and in remembrance of a Serbian revolt in 1804 rather than for what Muslim military forces might had done in the past two or three years around Srebrenica. During that speech he called Bosnian Muslims Turks for two main reasons: firstly, to denote historical links between the present-day Muslims of Bosnia and Herzegovina with the Ottomans or Turks of events two centuries ago and secondly, knowing that Bosnian Muslims or Bosniaks do not call themselves Turks today, he intentionally used derogatory term for Bosniaks to dehumanize this particular ethnic group. Both reasons made the acceptance of his soliers of carrying out mass executions of Bosnian Muslim boys and men in and around Srebrenica easier.

However, the area of Srebrenica was supposedly a safe zone under the UN jurisdiction as a result of the UN Security Council resolution 819 on 16 April 1993. Since it was proclaimed a safe zone, no noticeable attempt was made to defend the city and to fight from the Bosnian Muslim side in July 1995. On the contrary when the Serb entered Srebrenica on 11 of July, women, children and the elderly were gathered at the UN base in Potocari where around two hundred Dutch peacekeepers and supporting personnel were stationed. The Dutch peacekeepers did not or could not protect tens of thousands of civilians from Serb arms. At the same time, the majority of men made attempts to flee the Srebrenica zone to the free territory some fifty kilometers north-west towards the town of Tuzla. However, what followed within couple of days on their journey was a brutal, well-organized and consistent mass killing of over eight thousand of unarmed Muslim men and boys.

Three main facts are clear two decades after the Srebrenica genocide. First, on the basis of detailed evidence and DNA analysis, it is apparent that the Serb military forces tried to conceal unspeakable acts by hiding mass graves or unearthing primary massgraves and placing the bodies of Srebrenica men and boys in secondary locations.

Second, they have tried to manipulate the number of executed in and around Srebrenica. Many Serbs are strong in their belief that Srebrenica and other places of mass executions on Bosnian Muslims have been exaggerated to form a Muslim-Western propaganda against the Serbian people. On the basis of a number of interviews with representatives of the Orthodox Church, Tania Wettach concluded that many interviewees associate the term justice with the “self-image of the Serbian people and the Serbian Orthodox Church as a target for anti-Serbian or pro-Bosnian politics from the international community.”

Third, the Serb political establishment deny that genocide happened in Srebrenica, indicating that this was only a local incident carried out by certain individuals. Those who unashamedly try to deny the genocide include the president of Republic of Srpska, Milorad Dodik. He began denying the Srebrenica genocide a few years ago, arguing that Srebrenica was “a local incident” or “an isolated incident.” Accordingly, instead of the army of the Republic of Srpska being responsible for that “crime” it was deemed to have been done by a small group of individuals. In 2010, while visiting Srebrenica he declared: What happened here was not a genocide.' Also, the president of Serbia, Tomislav Nikolic, stated “It is very difficult to indict someone and prove before a court that an event qualifies as genocide.” is nothing but a contradiction to the verdict of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia.  As a result of their aggressive diplomatic lobbying, a UN resolution that would have condemned the 1995 massacre as a ‘crime of genocide’ has been vetoed by Russia last Wednesday. Russian Ambassador Vitaly Churkin called the UK-drafted text “not constructive, confrontational and politically-motivated,” arguing that it unfairly singled out Bosnian Serbs for war crimes.

That Srebrenica was not “an isolated or local incident” committed by a small group of disorganized Serb soldiers is proven by the following fact. In 2004, under the pressure of then high representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina, Paddy Ashdown, the government of Republic of Srpska issued a report on Srebrenica, which shows that over 25,000 soldiers of the Army of Republic of Srpska were involved in the Srebrenica massacre. The operation under the code name *Krivaja 95* was planned in detail in the headquarters of the Drina Corps

The denial of any genocide causes a number of concerns for the victims. In the Bosnian case, Bosnian Muslims, especially those who are returning to their pre-war homes, fear that the denial of genocide may well be a preparation for another one. Their fears may well be justified, according to Gregory Stanton, the president of Genocide Watch, who warns of a dangerous politics of a perpetual denial of genocide: “Denial is the eighth stage that always follows a genocide. It is among the surest indicators of further genocidal massacres. The perpetrators of genocide dig up the mass graves, burn the bodies, try to cover up the evidence and intimidate the witnesses. They deny that they committed any crimes, and often blame what happened on the victims. They block investigations of the crimes, and continue to govern until driven from power by force, when they flee into exile.”

While still mourning and burying their relatives, the Muslims of Srebrenica and surrounding towns face a number of challenges related to the return to their pre-war homes. The return to their former homes means a return to the Republic of Srpska, where the majority of Serbs live, some of whom took part in the execution of their relatives. Although theoretically Muslims have a right to employment, education, voting and security, in practice they are second class citizens in those areas. As a result, many seek to live permanently in majority-Muslim areas of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, or are migrating to third countries.

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