



COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS
COMMISSAIRE AUX DROITS DE L'HOMME



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***Commemoration of the
23th anniversary of the Srebrenica genocide***
Potočari, 11 July 2018

Address by Dunja Mijatović

Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights

It is a great honour to be here with you on this day, a day that is painful for those who will lay their loved ones to rest and for the many family members of the victims still waiting to find out the truth.

I am here as Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights and as your fellow citizen to express my deepest condolences to the families of the victims, to honour the victims and to join my voice to yours, calling for truth, justice, and respect.

As anytime I come here, words do not come out easily. These steles, those names engraved in the cold marble, this beautiful landscape that so starkly contrasts with the evil that happened here, stand as testimony of the cruelty that human beings are capable of when they are imbued with propaganda and prejudices, fear and hate.

Today, we commemorate the more than 8000 human beings - mainly men and boys - who were murdered in less than a week with a cruelty not seen in Europe since WWII. I honour the courage and strength of their mothers, spouses and sisters who persist in their fight for the truth and justice. No words can ever truly fill the void of the absence of their loved ones, but they can and must break the silence and avoid that it covers up the atrocities that happened here.

And our words must be loud and strong. Stronger than the words of those who deny the genocide. Today more than ever.

One third of 40 000 persons who went missing during the 1990s' wars have not yet been accounted for, more than 1000 of them are victims of the Srebrenica genocide. Lack of political will, insufficient co-operation among Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia, inadequate human and financial resources are big obstacles that still prevent relatives to know where their family members are. Victims families' still suffer not knowing the truth. Mothers pass away before being able to lay their children's remains to rest.

Today as we mourn the victims, I call on all political leaders in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia to become more compassionate towards the victims, the survivors and their families and make the search for missing persons a top priority. No political consideration can override the duty to find the truth about a missing person and give a measure of peace to that person's family.

23 years have passed since the genocide and 14 years since the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, whose legacy I strongly support, first determined that genocide was committed in Srebrenica. And, yet, many continue to deny it or minimise it.

War criminals continue to be welcome as heroes throughout the region and hold prominent public roles in which they continue to promote their retrograde and nationalistic views. The same abhorrent views which

led to so much human suffering during the wars that disintegrated not only a country, but the lives of thousands of people in the 1990s.

Across the region today there should be commemoration and remembrance of the victims of the Srebrenica genocide, unfortunately, this is not the case.

All this is an insult to the victims and exacerbates the suffering of the survivors. We have to reverse course. We – governments, the judiciary, international organisations, NGOs, individuals – we all have to help the victims and their families to find justice, obtain respect and receive reparation for the harm they endured.

This is crucial not only for them, but also for us and the society we want to bequeath to our children. If we want them to grow in the spirit of diversity, tolerance and respect for the other, if we want to provide them with the necessary antibodies to fight indoctrination, hate and violence, then we cannot afford to put under the carpet the historic events that are not to someone's liking.

We have to educate them about the past, educate them to debunk myths, educate them about justice and equality for all.

As we mourn the victims today, let remind ourselves that only through knowledge of the truth, respect for all the victims of the past crimes and open dialogue about these issues that this society may attain the social cohesion needed to achieve reconciliation and preserve its inherent, valuable diversity.

This is the only way we can confront the past and prevent that it repeats itself.