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Srebrenica – Beyond the Reasonable Doubt

Conference

11 June 2005, Belgrade

At the conference "Srebrenica - Beyond the Reasonable Doubt", held in Belgrade on 11 June 2005, the Humanitarian Law Center asked the Government of the Republic of Serbia to stop sheltering the Hague indictee, Ratko Mladić, and to assume responsibility for the crimes committed in the name of the state and of the citizens of Serbia. The purpose of the morning session of the conference was to familiarize the public in Serbia with the evidence upon which the verdict pronounced on general Radislav Krstić was based. In the afternoon, mothers from Srebrenica testified about the events of 11 and 12 July 1995 when the Serb forces separated their sons from them and took them away. With the moment of silence, for the first time in Serbia, respect was shown to the victims of the crime committed in Srebrenica.

Opening the conference, Mrs Nataša Kandić, the executive director of the Humanitarian Law Center, said that the recent gathering at the Law School in Belgrade and the video tape of the killing of the six Muslims from Srebrenica at the village of Godinjske Bare, on the slopes of Treskavica mountain, had produced certain changes in Serbia after the ten year-long silence about Srebrenica, although "what is still happening shows that the people in various institutions are still willing to maintain good relationships with the forces left over from the time of Milošević".

"There are no representatives of the Government and the Parliament of the Republic of Serbia with us today, but this does not lessen our intention and the intention of each and every participant in this conference to move forward within the framework of what has been initiated in Serbia. We will not let anybody deny the fact that genocide has been committed in Srebrenica. What we want and what we are asking for is the whole official truth about Srebrenica and, of course, about other crimes, the recognition of the victims and our respect for them. What is happening in our Parliament, and with the President of the Parliament, is an indecent play with Serbia's responsibility for the crimes committed in the past. Should the Parliament decide to adopt a general declaration condemning all the crimes, then it will show that, in fact, it is not yet ready renounce Milošević's inheritance."

In this sense, Mrs Ivana Dulić-Marković, the Minister of Agriculture in the Government of the Republic of Serbia, took the floor and, in her own name, asked the Serbian Parliament not to adopt a text condemning, in principle, all the crimes committed in the 90s on the territory of former Yugoslavia instead of taking a clear stand toward the massacre in Srebrenica:

"I should have spoken all words against the crime, all big and important words, before the crimes were committed. Now it is late, of course. All of us should have spoken, I, too, should have spoken in a louder and a braver voice against such a policy and the environment which have given the normal people the right to turn into beasts and, again, the right to the beasts to turn into some of us. I am begging the member of Parliament who represents me there not to vote for an agreed-upon declaration where it says that all of us everything and then nothing. Because my guilt, or somebody else's guilt, or crime, cannot be agreed upon."

The Humanitarian Law Center had invited the Prime Minister and the President of the Republic of Serbia to open this conference, but neither had accepted the invitation explaining this with previous obligations. Of more than a hundred invited members of Parliament only a few came to the conference. From Montenegro, Mr. Rifat Rastoder, the Vice-President of the Assembly of Montenegro, attended the conference:

"Montenegro had begun, before Serbia did, the re-examination of its own misconceptions and historical complexes. However, I would not dare claim that the percentage of those who still refuse to acknowledge the truth about the crime in Srebrenica, or those who still believe that the persons indicted for these and the like crimes are heroes, is any lower in Montenegro than in Serbia. The masks *are* lowered, but it will definitely take quite a lot of time and effort for all the masks to be removed and for the conditions to be created where something like this will never again be possible."

The Deputy Ambassador of the United States to Serbia and Montenegro, Mr. Roderick W. Moor, believes that the effort Serbia is making to deal with the crime in Srebrenica is of key importance for the process of reconciliation in the region. "The crimes committed in Srebrenica, the most heinous crimes in Europe after World War II, must not be forgotten. It is an undeniable fact that ten years ago, the Serb forces, under the command of Ratko Mladić, had massacred nearly 8,000 Bosniacs in the enclave of Srebrenica. We know that there had been many Serb victims of the war crimes in the 90s in Croatia, in Bosnia, even in Kosovo. Still, the argument I am most often given is that all parties are guilty of the crimes. This, however, does not justify the crimes committed by the Serbs, nor does it relieve the perpetrators of the crimes of their guilt. We are not condemning, nor have we ever condemned the Serb nation as a criminal nation. It is not the Serb nation that has committed these crimes. The crimes have been committed by cruel and unscrupulous individuals. And it is those individuals who must be brought to justice before the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia in the Hague or before a domestic court", said Mr. Moor.

The Voice of the Victims

Kada Hotić:

"I am here with you so that we could, somehow, make it clear who it was that made us quarrel, what happened to us. Until yesterday, my neighbors, who we used to drink coffee with, suddenly decided to kill us, instead of being good neighbors, because this

is the way they had planned it. Had it not happened, I would still have had my Samir, my husband, my brothers. Killing them, they have killed me. What is my life like without them? This is a life without joy. This is a senseless life. The only mistake those who caused all my suffering had made was that they had failed to kill us all because we have remained here, to testify. It is harder for a criminal to bear the burden of his guilt than it is to me to bear my suffering. I wouldn't want to change places with him..."

"Not long after that, they called my brother and took him into one of those houses in Potočari. Later we learned that people had been tortured there. It was there that they cut off from them everything that could be cut off. Starting with noses, ears, fingers, they gouged their eyes there, cut off the lower parts of their bodies. Then they poured water on them, with hoses. A woman went there, looking for a latrine, and glanced into one of those houses. She was shocked. She was beyond herself for five days. Even today, when she speaks, she says: 'Those eyes are still looking at me.' The woman was in shock. While I was looking at my son leaving, he was tall, I believe, a head taller than all those youths who went into the woods with him. I was looking at those boys, their torn T-shirts, the sleeves cut here and there, with holes in the back, but his back was beautiful. It was the youth walking there through the woods. And it was the youth that they were shooting at. Their intention was to kill them, to destroy those young men. I called him: "Samir!" He turned toward me and I said to him: "Good luck, son!" I wished him happiness. I hoped he would survive, he would come back alive. He did not make it. Today, how can I believe, how can anyone persuade me to be with those neighbors again? I say, I won't forgive the criminals their crimes, never, and they should not be forgiven, but I would like the sane people to start reasoning and to condemn the crime, so we can build a better future for all of us. Here, in these parts, we are destined to live together. We cannot be ethnically divided. There is no ethnically divided country in the world. No, there isn't."

Zumra Šehomerović:

"July 12, evening. Terror, bawling, yelling, cries. Night. The valley echoes with the cries of the people, of women. Someone is yelling: "They took my son away!" Someone is begging: "They are raping my daughter!" Horrible things were happening in Potočari. People were horrified by the video tape scene showing the killing of six innocent boys, but I must tell you that the scene has just reminded me of the horrors as I have seen even more dreadful scenes. Still, I think it is easier to kill a man by a firearm than to slaughter them with a knife and listen to their wheezing and hissing. I also think it is easier to watch the killing than listen to the shrieks of a girl being raped. I also believe it is easier for me to see this than the scene in Potočari - a pile of fingers, ears, gauged eyes which, dead like this, in a heap, were asking for salvation. In a single moment, in Potočari, people were dying, slaughtered, raped, hanged and born. In a single moment, in Potočari, life was arrested for a blink of an eye. All the vehicles readied for the people who were supposed to be evacuated from Potočari were from Serbia, from Šabac, from Valjevo, from Užice, even the buses from Novi Sad were parked in front of Potočari, the buses to evacuate the people from Potočari. So, everything had been prepared in advance, planned, readied."

Hiba Mehmetović:

"I am not satisfied with the penalties pronounced on the criminals going to the Hague. Personally, I believe this is an injustice. I, personally, am offended. Sometimes, I ask myself: Good God, is human life so valueless? I am alone now, I live all alone. I have friends, I have these mates here, but I am just vegetating, like a plant, and waiting for the day I shall die. I live for that day. I don't know why I live. I would like to find them, to give them a decent burial. Sometimes I think - God, they may be alive, they may come back to me... Here's my Kemal. Here's Nedžad. They are coming... Sometimes, I call them in the morning... Lucky you, Zumra, lucky you, Kada, you at least have someone waiting for you at home. I go back to an empty house. Empty. I can't any more. Thank you very much. Excuse me, please, Excuse me..."

Sabra Kolenović:

"Still, all evil originated in Serbia, with the help of our neighbors from Bosnia. But, without Serbia, they would not have done what they had done. All arms, both small arms and heavy, they got them from Serbia."

Sabaheta Fejzić:

"With my son I came to Potočari on 11 July, in the afternoon; and there were very many refugees there. It was terribly hot; the first night I spent in a dilapidated factory with my son. On 12 July 1995, we were left at the mercy of the chetniks, the Yugoslav National Army, various paramilitary formations and the local Serbs, my neighbors. Immediately after their entry they began separating and taking away boys and men. Should some of the members of their families ask them where they were taking them, they would say they were being taken to be questioned and that, after that, they would be brought back. However, they took them away and never brought them back. To this day nobody knows where they are."

"I felt apprehension then, I was afraid for the safety of my son, and I left this closed area, I went out into the open, to be there, with other people, thinking I would save the life of my child this way. But the situation worsened; the number of the chetniks and those men in uniforms was increasing. They were armed with knives, rifles, bandoliers... they were terrifyingly armed. I saw then my neighbors, Sreten Petrović and Milisav Gavrić, some 100 meters from where I had been standing. I left my child with my mother, who was with us, to go to them and ask them to save my child, as I had already become aware of what would happen to us in Potočari. I started through the crowd, but the people were so pressed against one another that I found it difficult to move through; then a thought flashed through my mind - that I must return to where I had left my child. The thought was stronger than my decision. I turned around immediately and I found my mother, crying. I ask her: 'Mother, where is Rijad?', and she cries out and says: 'They took him away; they are somewhere near here'. Woe to me, oh my mother, they have taken my child away! I ran toward the place where they were standing and I found my child in a group of men. 'Why have you taken my son away?' I ask them. 'It's none of your business why we took him away, we want only to question him and we will return him immediately'. And I tell them: 'There is nothing you can question him about. If you want to question anyone, here I am. You leave my child alone, and take and question me. The child knows nothing. He can't tell you anything'. They began cursing me, they were not letting me have my child. Then I threatened them: 'You know, I will tell UNPROFOR what you are doing' and this

helped me. They gave me back my child. I took him and came to where my mother was. We were terribly afraid. I knew that the situation was even more dangerous now and I felt that not a single man or boy would be saved from the chetniks."

"I was there all night, but the worst part was the night between 12 and 13 July. On 13 July, I was, with my son, on my way toward the trucks and the buses used for the deportation from Potočari. First I had to pass the line of the Dutch soldiers and then go by the lined chetniks standing along the road all the way to the trucks and buses we were supposed to use to be deported. I passed through the Dutch soldiers, but when I came to the chetniks they approached us and told my child to turn right and me to turn left. I told them: 'If my child goes right, I go where he goes.' They wouldn't let me go with him. We started pulling at him. They were pulling the child toward them, I was pulling him toward me. I begged them: 'Please, don't take my child away from me! This is my only child. I have no more children. If you need someone to go, I beg of you, take me, but let go of my child...' It was no use. They tore him off. I couldn't even cry then. My child was crying. I will never forget the big teardrops running down his pale cheeks from his dark-olive eyes. When I realized that there was nothing I could do, I went down on my knees, put my hands together and said: 'Kill me, please!' One of them pulled the bolt back on his rifle. I thought: 'Thank God, they will kill me! It's better this way...' However, one of them said: 'There is no use killing a balinkuša'.¹ He came up to me, took me by the chest and threw me bodily into the truck. At the same moment, the truck moved. I was lying on the floor of the truck and I don't remember the trip from Potočari to Tišča... For the last ten years I have been trying to learn the fate of my husband and my child. Ten years have gone by and I still know nothing of the fate of my child. I don't know whether I will ever discover a single part of his body."

The best illustration of the crime committed in Srebrenica ten years ago that the participants in the conference could see was a documentary recording of the shooting of six Bosniacs which not long ago created quite a shock in the domestic and foreign public. To the director of the Investigation and Research Center from Sarajevo, Mr. Mirsad Tokača, what could be seen on the film recording was nothing new: "What you have seen is nothing compared with what you have not seen as yet. All these years nobody could believe that all this had really happened. When, in June 1992, we published the first accounts about the existence of the camps, concentration camps in Bosnia and Herzegovina at the end of the twentieth century, nobody believed us. They said it was our propaganda. Then they were convinced that these camps did exist. Death. Death is nothing. Nothing. Absolutely nothing. Any victim will tell you that. What is the most difficult to bear is the degradation of the human being they had contrived for us. The degradation we are still exposed to. Today, in Serbia, some people might want to admit the events in Srebrenica and let it all end with this. They would want to reduce the Bosnian historical suffering to Srebrenica alone. It will not do, gentlemen! Azmir, whom you saw on the recording, is only one of 477 children who were killed from March 1992."

Tokača believes that the objective of the aggression of Serbia and Montenegro, joined

¹ A derogatory term for a Muslim woman.

by Croatia, was the disappearance of Bosnia and Herzegovina from the political map of the world. Serbs in Serbia, too, were the victims of the totalitarian regime which made use of ethnic, religious and national feelings to initiate a bloody war against the neighbors, said Tokača.

In his words, those responsible for the killing of six Bosniacs in Srebrenica, "were given legitimacy in Serbia", because they were voted in, they were given authority and state institutions. "Until President Tadić admits what has been done in the name of Serbia we won't move a step forward. There is a collective, political and moral responsibility of the collective called Serbia" said Tokača.

A journalist of the Sarajevo weekly, *Dani*, Mr. Emir Suljagić, also believes that the video cassette with the recording of the shooting of civilians in Bosnia was most badly needed by Serbia itself. "I am really angry. The first thing that came to my mind when the recording was over was - there, that's what you are. Here are the people that you were careful not to cross paths with for ten years. These are the people you were afraid of hurtling a single stone at. And now, suddenly, a cassette appears and Serbia is, make believe, shocked and I am, make believe, grateful, right? You don't say! This cassette is of no importance for Bosnia, believe me. No importance at all. This cassette is important to you. The fact that it appeared is important for Serbia. I did not have to see the recording in order to know that this had happened because this had happened before my very eyes", said Suljagić.

At the end of the conference, the executive director of the Humanitarian Law Center, Mrs Nataša Kandić, said that Serbia should stop providing shelter for the likes of those seen in the video recording as well as for the Hague indictee, Ratko Mladić. "After all that had happened in May, the only normal thing we could do would be to stop giving shelter to the people like those seen in the video recording and to Ratko Mladić, to stop killing young soldiers at Topčider because that is where we are hiding Ratko Mladić and others. The only message is that Ratko Mladić should be arrested and delivered to the Hague Tribunal."