

Statement by High Representative and EU Special Representative Christian Schwarz-Schilling at Potocari Memorial Centre



It is impossible not to be moved when visiting this place.

Genocide was committed here. The verdict of the International Court of Justice has confirmed that.

Whoever rejects the finding that the killings of Srebrenica constitute genocide is placing him or herself outside the norms of civilisation.

The ICJ verdict must be accepted in full and without reservation.

Justice must be done.

Those responsible for this crime must be held accountable and brought before the courts in The Hague and in the region. Some criminals have been prosecuted and convicted.

However, 12 years on, justice has not been done. Cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia is not a choice; it is an obligation.

Not fulfilling this obligation is morally reprehensible, and it carries a heavy political price.

If the crime is recognised for what it is, and if there is full cooperation with the Tribunal, a basis will have been created for reconciliation.

And reconciliation does not simply happen. It is a long-term process.

Houses can be rebuilt. But the wounds inflicted on bodies and minds do not heal quickly.

As a German from the generation that was growing up during the terrible Nazi regime and the Second World War, I know this all too well. Indeed, I have lived this.

But reconciliation is possible, and it must be the goal of all political leaders of this country. Leaders of civil society must also play their role.

Other matters have been raised in the wake of the ICJ verdict, including a possible change of Bosnia and Herzegovina's constitution and a special status for Srebrenica.

Such matters are legitimate issues for political debate.

However, let me be absolutely clear. No such changes can be imposed, and they cannot be decided unilaterally.

Constitutional change must be based on a broad consensus and on negotiation.

To suggest otherwise is a dangerous illusion.

Turning to the families of the victims of Srebrenica, the international community has provided a great deal of assistance. Nonetheless, we have to acknowledge that many returnees still face great difficulties and obstacles in their daily lives.

The international community must and will continue to provide assistance, so that Srebrenica can develop and can be a dignified home for all people living here.

It is my hope that the ICJ verdict will prove to be a defining moment for Bosnia and Herzegovina and for the international community as a whole.

For the international community, the verdict has reaffirmed that the prevention of genocide is an obligation. Political leaders must never forget this.

For Bosnia and Herzegovina, the verdict should be viewed as an opportunity to come to terms with the past.

It is in times like these that exceptional leaders and leadership can make all the difference.

This was the case in Western Europe half a century ago when six countries came together to create the European Community, exactly 12 years after the Second World War.

12 years after genocide was committed in Srebrenica, it is time for leadership in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

It is time for responsibility. It is time for sustainable peace to be realised. And it is time for reconciliation to begin in earnest.

Thank you.