

Remarks by the High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch, at the opening of a presentation of paintings, poetry and prose on the theme of Srebrenica: Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow

Organizers: the Association of Citizens "Mothers of Srebrenica and Zepa Enclaves"

Venue: ICRC, Zmaja od Bosne 136, Sarajevo

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Six years ago, thousands of men and boys were massacred at Srebrenica. Those who were bereaved by this appalling crime carry a burden of pain to this day. Some of the relatives and loved ones of the deceased are with us this evening.

We extend to them our sympathy; at the same time we know that sympathy will not eradicate their pain. There are some things which almost defy the simplest and sincerest words of comfort.

The events that took place in Srebrenica in 1995 shamed the world. The victims of the massacre were formally under the protection of the international community when they were murdered.

We remember this with revulsion. We remember it in detail. We

will never forget.

In October 2000, I issued a Decision designating in perpetuity a plot of land at Potocari to be set aside as a cemetery and as a solemn place for the etery and as a solemn place for the erection of a memorial to the victims of the Srebrenica Massacre. In May this year I issued a Decision establishing and registering the Foundation of the Srebrenica-Potocari Memorial and Cemetery, which will receive and disburse funds to build and maintain the memorial and cemetery. On Wednesday this week a marker stone will be formally installed on the site where the burials will occur and the memorial will be built. I issued these decisions because burying the victims of Srebrenica according to the proper rites and customs, and honouring their memory with dignity is a moral obligation.

This commemoration is also an integral and indispensable part of Bosnia and Herzegovina's postwar recovery. Those who forget the past are destined to repeat it.

We will continue to do everything in our power to bring to account those responsible for the crime which was committed at Srebrenica in July 1995. Justice may be slow, but it will come. Just a week ago the arrest of Slobodan Milosevic and his arraignment before the International Criminal Tribunal at The Hague demonstrated that though the machinery of national and international justice may be ponderous, those accused of war crimes will finally be held to account.

We are here today to inaugurate an exhibition of essays, poems and art work produced by schoolchildren and university students on the theme theme of Srebrenica: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow. There is, of course, no obvious joy in this theme yet the nature of creative expression is to examine reality without cynicism and without despair and to look forward without bitterness. Art considers what comes after suffering and good art, whether it be prose, poetry or painting, celebrates the simple and immutable truth that those

who inflict suffering never triumph.

We must respect the memory of the dead; we must do everything in our power to assuage the grief of those who have been bereaved –and we must look forward with hope.

Looking forward with hope can be intensely practical. Since we last observed this anniversary, the pace of civic regeneration in Srebrenica has increased significantly.

Under the Srebrenica Action Plan, my office, along with SFOR, the OSCE, the UN Mission in BiH and UNHCR, is working with a variety of international agencies, including CARE and the EU's Quick Impact Facility, to help ensure that Srebrenica's social, educational and economic infrastructure can sustain full-scale return.

Recent measures introduced under the action plan include

- a development report commissioned by the British Embassy, which will provide a basis for the work of the Srebrenica Economic Forum;
- a programme to facilitate the return of displaced police officers; and
- stepped up OSCE guidance to the Srebrenica OMI office, resulting in an increase in the number of decisions issued by that office.

The thread of personal and communal life that was brutally broken six years ago is now being systematically repaired.

We will continue to promote this work in every way we can, and we will do this in a spirit of resolution and hope.

This is a debt we owe to the sons and daughters of Srebrenica; it is a debt we owe the living and the dead.

Thank you.