

Remarks by the High Representative on the occasion of the first burials at Potocari Cemetery of victims of the 1995 Srebrenica Massacre

The Secretary General of the United Nations, Mr Kofi Annan, has today sent me the following message which he has asked me to read:-

"Nearly eight years ago, here in Srebrenica, thousands of innocent civilians were slaughtered. This service ends a long period of waiting and anguish for the survivors' families, and the beginning of an important stage in the process of healing for the entire region.

"The United Nations remembers the horrific events of Srebrenica with the deepest pain. To this day, high officials indicted for leading the massacre have not been apprehended. We must ensure that such crimes are never again repeated, and that justice is carried out fully through the work of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia.

"Our common aim is not only to assist in healing the wounds of the survivors of this tragedy, but also to build peace and lay the foundations for long-term recovery and future prosperity. The people of Bosnia, who survived a terrible ordeal, deserve no less."

Ladies and Gentlemen, distinguished guests,

I stand here today as the International Community's representative.

As the European Union's representative.

As a human being.

And as a friend.

Today has been a long time coming.

But now, at last with dignity, solemnity and with love, the first of Srebrenica's slaughtered can finally be laid to rest.

I would like to thank all those whose generosity has made today's burials possible.

But most of all, I would like to thank the mothers and families, whose personal suffering and courage I can barely imagine.

I thank them for their patience and for their fortitude through the eight terrible years that have passed since the horrors that unfolded in the sunlight – and under the gaze of the world – in this valley in July 1995.

I hope that I can speak to the families as one human to another, that you will find this site to be a fitting memorial to your loved ones, and a peaceful place to mourn and to remember.

I hope also, that this site will act as a reminder to all of us in Bosnia and Herzegovina of what happens when a nation loses its head and abandons the values of tolerance and humanity which are the only foundation of peace.

Most of all, I hope this site will remind the world of what happens if we stand by and do nothing while evil flourishes.

We, the International Community, are only too well aware of our historic duty to put right the mistakes of the past. We will not let up until that duty has been discharged.

We will not let up until we have brought the horrors of the past to conclusion, until we have exacted justice for the deceased, brought peace to the survivors and built a future for our children.

For those who we bury, this marks a final resting place.

For those who mourn, I hope this marks a milestone on the long road from grief to peace.

And for those who watch, let this be a moment to re-dedicate ourselves to the ongoing struggle for truth, justice, reconciliation and recovery.

For, as we know, it will not be in the wide-open spaces of political activity, but in the small confines of each human heart that the ultimate victory of good over evil will be secured.

The evil that was done here will never be forgotten. But may this site serve as a mark of our determination that it will never be repeated.