

Address by the High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch, at the U.N. Srebrenica Donors' Conference

13 May 2002

Let me first thank the sponsors of this event, the United Nations and the United Nations development Programme, for the invitation to this important meeting. Sitting right next to the Women of Podrinje, I use this opportunity to express my wholehearted support to the Srebrenica Regional Recovery Programme presented today.

Under Annex 10 of the Dayton-Paris Agreement, it is the mandate of the High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina to co-ordinate the efforts of the international civilian organisations. I would like to underline the fact that the Srebrenica Regional Recovery Programme is a crucial element in the combined effort of the international community to offer practical and substantial assistance to the people of the region so that they can continue on the long journey towards regenerating and restoring their community.

In fact, the Srebrenica Regional Recovery Programme explicitly builds on the Srebrenica Action Plan. My Office, along with SFOR, the UN Mission to BiH and UNHCR as well as the OSCE Mission, has been implementing this plan 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. I believe it will consolidate and accelerate the progress that has been made so far.

Helping people commemorate the past is a natural and necessary complement to the work of helping them face the future. In the video presentation which we have just seen there was a short segment which shows some very moving scenes from last year's unveiling of the marker stone at Potocari during the commemoration of the 1995 massacre, the suspected perpetrators of which, Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladic, are deplorably still at large.

The planning and implementation of the Potocari Memorial and Cemetery, of which the marker stone is a symbol, is a project, supervised by my Office, which aims to ensure that the victims of this horrible massacre will never be forgotten. The memorial and cemetery are located on the site I designated for this purpose in the autumn of 2000. The site has space for up to 10,000 graves, an open-air prayer area, and the display of a List of the Missing. Options for the establishment of a museum and archive as well as a support centre are now being explored. Work on the project has been complicated but it has been steady – it is moving forward with the support of the international community and the active participation of all of the main survivors' associations.

The activities of the International Commission on Missing Persons (ICMP), which Her Majesty Queen Noor just elaborated on, represent the third pillar of the international community's work in Srebrenica. The ICMP, through its Missing Persons' Institute, which uses the latest DNA technology in the complex and delicate process of identifying human remains, is engaged in a task aimed at bringing a sense of closure to grief-stricken survivors. The identification of the victims of the massacre means that those who perished can be laid to rest with dignity and with appropriate rites. The process of mass identification has only just begun; it will now accelerate.

The Srebrenica Regional Recovery Programme, the Potocari Memorial Foundation and the work of the ICMP represent a collective effort by the international community and its local

partners to address the past and prepare for the future. While today's donor meeting focuses on the Srebrenica Regional recovery Programme, the memorial component, as well as the identification efforts deserve and require our continued support.

Keeping this in mind, I remain convinced and have put this repeatedly to the victims' associations – that the most lasting justice for the victims of Srebrenica would be the return of Bosniaks – the victims' families – to their homes in Srebrenica. This is already underway. SFOR, UNMIBH, the UNHCR, the OSCE and other agencies, operating within the OHR-led Reconstruction and Return Task Force, have all worked diligently and productively to ensure that a viable economy can sustain return to Srebrenica within a secure environment. The Srebrenica Regional Recovery Programme will underpin these efforts in a crucial and sustainable fashion.

Return is at the heart of the Dayton Peace Agreement. Return is at the core of the effort to place a tolerant and multi-cultural Bosnia and Herzegovina in the heart of Europe. Return will not undo this terrible massacre. But return will ensure that the authors of ethnic cleansing did not achieve their criminal goal.