

Speech at the Opening of an Exhibition of Handicraft by Women of Srebrenica in Remembrance of the Victims of Srebrenica

Women of Srebrenica, ladies and gentlemen,

We are here to mark a dark day. On July 11, 1995 Srebrenica fell to Bosnian Serb forces. Women, children and the elderly were forced onto buses and expelled. They did not know — and still don't know today — what happened to their husbands, sons, fathers and brothers; men and boys who tried to escape through the forests and mountains of eastern Bosnia, the land where they were born.

I find it difficult to even begin to comprehend how civilised life could have broken down in such a brutal and terrifying way.

I find it difficult to know how to meet adequately their families' sorrow — especially those who are with us tonight. The true figure is not 7,412 missing — it is tens of thousands of wives, daughters, mothers and sisters who still hurt from the evil done in Srebrenica.

Judge Riad, of the war crimes tribunal in The Hague, spoke well when he described the acts of those who ordered and committed this unspeakable crime as: "truly scenes from hell, written on the darkest pages of human history".

As a representative of the International Community, I am also fully aware of how we failed the people of Srebrenica that day. A "safe haven" was anything but safe. This day shamed the international community. We have a lasting obligation to continue to help the people of Srebrenica and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Tonight's gathering is a hopelessly small and symbolic gesture. Along with coming to terms with what happened, the women of Srebrenica must still struggle to make a living five years on.

The crime of Srebrenica must never be forgotten. It is a disgrace that five years later there is no decision on a location for a cemetery and memorial to the dead and missing. I would like to offer international expert advice to help come up with a plan for a memorial site. This advice is offered alongside the work already undertaken by the joint Bosniak/Serb Commission on the site in Srebrenica. I also offer my authority to help in any way I can to make sure such a site is established as early as possible. The memorial would not only be for the dead and missing. The memorial must enable the families left behind to grieve. The memorial must serve to tell all in Bosnia and Herzegovina — never again.

But I also put it to you 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. I will do all in my power to make sure returns to Srebrenica continue and that people are able to rebuild their lives.

Return is at the heart of Dayton. Return is at the heart of placing a tolerant and multi-cultural Bosnia and Herzegovina in Europe.

Return will not undo this terrible massacre. But return would show that the authors of ethnic cleansing did not achieve their criminal goal. And I voice a timid hope — difficult at this time for you — that by marking this day, we will all of us move forward along the difficult path of reconciliation. Only along this path can we truly declare — never again.

Thank you.