

High Representative's opening remarks at the commemoration of the 29th anniversary of Srebrenica Genocide



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Dear ladies and gentlemen, we have come here today to commemorate the 29th anniversary of the Srebrenica genocide, committed in this area, in this very hall where we are now.

I am honoured to be able share this day today with you.

On 23 May, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution designating 11 July as the “International Day of Reflection and Commemoration of the 1995 Genocide in Srebrenica” and condemning any denial of that historical event and any actions that glorify those convicted of war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide by international courts.

The Resolution is a clear expression of international commitment to upholding the dignity of survivors and honouring the legacy of those who were killed. Rejecting any attempts to minimize or distort the gravity of the Srebrenica genocide is imperative for a society. And it is, as you said, dear Mr. Fejzić, our prominent task to do more.

Honouring the victims of the Srebrenica genocide and war

crimes and crimes against humanity requires additional efforts. As I announced last year at this very place, aside of my support to declaring internationally July 11th as the Srebrenica remembrance day, I can report that there are some other important steps taken to contribute to the goal:

- Judgements by international tribunals and of national courts will be included in the BiH criminal records. The BiH Ministry of Justice and the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals have signed a memorandum to that effect, thank you for doing this.
- I saw the need to amend the BiH Election Law to prevent war criminals from holding public office after serving their sentence.
- My office continues to support the BiH Prosecutor's Office in line with established international standards to enable and encourage this institution to prosecute genocide denial and glorification of war criminals. Some steps have been taken, we have to work very, very intensely to do more.

In the same vein, allow me to use this opportunity to draw the attention of representatives of BiH authorities and the international community to two particular issues.

The first issue relates to missing persons. According to the Missing Persons Institute, more than 7,600 people are still unaccounted for from the 1992-1995 conflict. The lack of reliable information on potential gravesite locations continues to be the main obstacle, coupled with the lack of capacities to process the information. Local forensic resources involved in exhuming and identifying missing persons are in dire need of reinforcement and financial support. Today, it is our duty to make sure these 14 people, killed in July 1995, can rest in peace.

The second issue concerns murals glorifying war criminals,

which we see throughout the country, most notably in the eastern part of Republika Srpska. There is no way to come to terms with that. The glorification of war criminals is offensive to the victims, if not threatening, and it constitutes a breach of the BiH Criminal Code.

Municipalities encouraging, hosting, or not fighting these kinds of murals or initiatives contributing to the denial of war crimes and the glorification of war criminals, and not using their competencies and commitment, should be legally and financially responsible. I shall be working on this together with all of you.

Let me underline that all these decisions are not directed against any state or people, just the contrary: This is an open invitation to deal with the past together to prepare a better future. The Resolution is not an act targeting the Serb people or the Republika Srpska. It would support the creation of an open dialogue based on facts with all those who harbour good intentions.

Rather than being exploited for narrow political objectives, the Resolution must serve as a catalyst for healing and understanding.

This requires will and effort. No grand gesture can move us forward if it is not backed by small, tireless, and honest efforts of courageous citizens – so many of whom I note are here in this room

I take note that some representatives of the Republika Srpska are questioning the genocide of Srebrenica. But this is a symptom of the inability to deal with the dark parts of the past. No one has the right to describe any state or nation as genocidal. But, achieving a common “Never again” needs mutual respect and, foremost, the will for reconciliation. We see that this is not easy and may be a hard way to go for some.

But the difficult path your brothers, your sons, and your

fathers had to tread hoping for potential safety in Tuzla or other safe areas is also a reality. Indeed, it was impressive yesterday to take part and meet the participants of the Peace March. This is something that cannot be dismissed, something that needs to be respected. The mental and political road we have to navigate together now has no comparison: it is the way of hope, good future, and sustainable peace and reconciliation. It is the road we all have to take together in human brotherhood. I refuse to accept that denying of human disasters of Potočari, of Žepa or Prijedor, may continue without any thought. I refuse to accept some people's reasoning that, by somehow relativizing the misdeeds of history in this region of Europe, for example during World War II or whenever, they would lose weight if offset with the crimes between 1991 and 1995. No. Every crime, every horror, remains as it is. The terror by the German Wehrmacht in Kragujevac in 1941, or the terror in Jasenovac, remain historical facts and stand for themselves. No perpetrator can balance out their deeds using the deeds of others.

The remarkable address by Srebrenica Memorial Centre Director, Emir Suljagić, to the UN General Assembly was an example of such effort: he invited everyone to visit Srebrenica, including those who keep denying the historical and scientific facts.

Yes, Emir, this is the right way to go. We will walk with you.

We will invite everyone to come and to work on common projects to find historical truth and accept that, in this wonderful country in Europe called Bosnia and Herzegovina, a multi-ethnic population has the right to find its way through non-discrimination and mutual respect. Yes, we have to teach our children that our people, our group, our religion is not exclusive – the more we are aware of that, the better we will accommodate in an environment of tolerance without losing our own identity. This is better than putting into question the obligation to live together in peace by continuously violating

the letter and the spirit of the General Framework Agreement for Peace from Dayton. Those who do not wish to come into legal conflict with the High Representative, or with the Constitutional Court, or with the requirement to apply European standards in BiH, have a simple way ahead of them: loyalty to the common state and the defining of vital interests guided by the common will to come to a fair and functional compromise. One cannot daily put into question the set of rules and institutions that was agreed in Dayton and in Paris by all signatory states. No one can bend this reality to suit only themselves.

Pacta sunt servanda.

Just as the genocide in Srebrenica is not a lie, neither is the Dayton Peace Agreement, but an existing and binding law. If there are questions or ideas for amending this foundation of the State of BiH, let us discuss and if necessary decide on them. But, to be very clear: dissolution is not an acceptable or legitimate path. It is not possible because it violates the rights of all people in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Why not look for a debate and consent format that includes all the peoples and other groups in a dialogue about the common future within the set of rules as they have been agreed upon? If international, non-public help is requested, let us go for it. And let us make this approach a citizens' approach, reaching out to the young generation and not reserving it only to the political class. They have to raise their voices on behalf of their future.

Why should it not be possible, after the European Union's offer to BiH to become its member, to use this European momentum to bring self-evidence that, on a day like today, all three members of our state's Presidency can be present at such an important commemoration as is today's. Why should it not be normal for Ms. Cvijanović to sit beside Mr. Komšić and Mr. Bećirović, jointly mourning all the victims of war and

genocide, showing their respect? Could we prepare this with young people of all ethnic backgrounds and with common interests?

I wish we could break the notion of Bosnia and Herzegovina being an island of impunity, a place where the deeds have no consequences. Instead, BiH should stand as an example of reconciliation. I believe this is our duty. It is something we owe not only to the victims of the Srebrenica genocide first and foremost, but to all citizens of this beautiful country.

Thank you.