

HR Schmidt in Potočari: The politics of hatred deliver nothing but misery



(English subtitles not available)

Speech by High Representative Christian Schmidt at the ceremony to mark the 27th anniversary of the Srebrenica genocide

Potočari, 11 July 2022

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THE POLITICS OF HATRED DELIVER NOTHING BUT MISERY

Dear mourners, dear survivors, dear mothers of Srebrenica, ladies and gentlemen, your excellencies, the Head of the Organizing Committee, attendees of this commemoration,

Every time I come to this sacred place I feel our heavy burden – the burden of fatal aggression against young people who had so many plans and hopes ahead of them, against men in the middle of their lives caring for their families, against the elderly who were summing up their achievements for themselves and for the next generation, against us all, against humankind. And I feel the burden of the international community's failure to exercise its responsibility to protect those who were under threat of being slaughtered.

Nothing I can say today will ease the pain of those who have lost their husbands, their fathers, their sons, their brothers, and all others. But to be with them and pay respect to those whose remains are buried today is our sacred duty. And what all of us can do is to help prevent such pain from being inflicted again.

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We are here to honour the victims of genocide. Whoever tries to deny that what happened here in Srebrenica, at this very place and its surroundings, whoever tries to deny that this was genocide, whoever tries to minimize the number of victims as if that would diminish the guilt, the scale, and the horror of the crime – whoever does these things is living inside a cocoon of wilful ignorance.

What happened here 27 years ago was unique in the history of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It is right that the crime has been meticulously documented; it is right that a memorial has been built; it is right that, with the help of the ICTY and now the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals, the perpetrators have been punished and the victims are remembered by name.

This would not have been possible without the commitment of the many people dedicating themselves to the memory of the tortured. So let me thank you on behalf of the international community for what you are doing and for caring.

Today we remember those who died in Srebrenica, a town whose name has become synonymous with genocide. And I welcome the suggestion of the Deputy Mayor that we should work to make sure that for the next generation it would become the name of a town of hope.

We have to agree that all those who are glorifying war crimes and war criminals are hurting the mourners and all of us. They are violating the work for a better future. This behaviour has

to be outlawed as the outcome of a commonly agreed conviction by every human being regardless of his or her ethnic or religious origin, gender, or individual background.

The Office of the High Representative has been established as a serious conclusion after the shock for us international in 1995. It will, and I will execute its obligation to help this country and its people, to pave the way towards a future – an integrated European peaceful future.

We should all commit together to a future in which the next generation can live in this country and take the issue of peace and reconciliation into their own hands. And we have to do better.

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We should remember the many other places of suffering in Bosnia and Herzegovina and preserve them. We also have to work to make sure there is no vanishing of memory. Those who diminish the places where crimes happened are doing wrong to the memory and the people.

We remember those who died violently in every part of this country. We remember each and every victim whose life was extinguished because of hatred, because of fear. Attempts to justify the slaughter of people are attempts to turn the moral compass of the universe on its head. Using aggressive violence is never justified. It is with the determination to overcome the hatred that we honour the memory of all those who perished. We do this together. We do this with respect and with humility. *Mir s vama.*

The lesson of what happened in Srebrenica must never be forgotten. It is that the politics of hatred, the politics of resentment, of fear deliver nothing but misery. And we have to work to prevent it from happening, and we have to make the “never, never again” our dedication, not only on 11 July. We have to hand it over to the younger generation that deserves

the right to know everything that has happened – not in different curricula but in an open dialogue about how one can prevent this from happening in the future. So that we do not distinguish the younger generation based on different ethnic, gender, or religious backgrounds. I am very happy that the religious authorities are here confirming their conviction that everything has to be dedicated to peace. *Selam miru.*

Today, we honour the dead by renewing our commitment to justice, by renewing our commitment to building a country that values and protects each and every one of its citizens. And we confess again that we are here to help, and we are here to see an open way for all people in Bosnia and Herzegovina towards a peaceful life. And so, we as the international community have to stand together and make it clear that we want to contribute.

Today is a day of mourning; this is a day of commemoration. This is also a day of hope! The peaceful and prosperous future of the people of this country is our paramount obligation. And it may happen that we have a generation living in peace. We are all seeing what is happening in Europe these days, and it gives us some indication that we have to work proactively to achieve this. Let's do it!

Thank you very much. I wish to express my respect to all those who are suffering and working for a better future.