

Remarks by High Representative and EU Special Representative Valentin Inzko At the Opening of a Photo Exhibition, “Missing Lives”, Sponsored by the ICRC



The Fundamental Obligation of a Civilised Society

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The photographs exhibited here have nothing to do with politics.

These pictures are about people.

And at the human level there is no dispute. There is no polemic or ambiguity about the scale and the nature of the tragedy that afflicted this country.

We are speaking about the deaths of men and women and children.

These photographs bear eloquent testimony to our fundamental obligation as a civilised society to identify and lay to rest

the mortal remains of the victims.

There is a universe of loss in a single death. By identifying victims and documenting the circumstances in which they died, we can begin to make that universe less bleak, through respect and compassion.

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This work, of identification and documentation, is central to the long and often painful process of recovery from conflict.

I want to commend the ICRC, for its initiative in sponsoring this exhibition, which will now be shown throughout former Yugoslavia, and for its broader contribution to the search for missing persons.

And I also want to pay particular tribute to the BiH Missing Persons Institute and the International Commission on Missing Persons.

I want to assure all those who are engaged in this work that you have the continuing and unqualified support of the International Community. I believe too that you have the complete support of every decent citizen in this and in neighbouring countries.

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Those who attempt to manipulate numbers of victims or who seek to turn the suffering of others to their own political advantage deserve contempt. Any effort to politicise the search for missing persons must be resolutely resisted.

One hundred thousand of our neighbours died.

The suffering of those people and their families can only be addressed through constructive action – if, on the other hand, it is turned into a political issue, it will only be exploited.

To the leaders of Bosnia and Herzegovina I say, do what you are legally and morally obliged to do, support those who are working to establish the truth about what happened to the disappeared; support those who are working to locate and recover their mortal remains.

The pursuit of truth and the pursuit of justice are the best tools with which to confront those who took part in violence and those who incited violence. By supporting the search for truth and justice we can help to diminish the likelihood that such violence will ever be repeated.

I believe, therefore, that these photographs are not only a testament to past sacrifice; they are part of a common effort to maintain hope in the future.

Thank you