

Remarks by High Representative Valentin Inzko on the 20th anniversary of the helicopter crash at Prokosko Lake

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Members of the families, Mr. President, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Before making my remarks today, I first want to acknowledge and thank the local authorities – the Ministry of Interior, the Police Administration and Special Police, and the Fojnica municipality – for securing and maintaining this place of remembrance and this commemoration each and every year since that tragic day in 1997.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Twenty years ago the men and women we honour today lost their lives on this mountainside while working for peace.

In 1997, less than two years after the conflict, the wounds of war were still fresh in Bosnia and Herzegovina. No one knew for certain if the peace would hold. And there was much work to be done.

Peter Backes, Livio Beccaccio, Andrzej Buler, David Kriskovich, Leah Melnick, Charles Morpeth, William Nesbitt, Marvin Padgett, Thomas Reinhardt, Jurgen Schauf, Georg Stiebler and Gerd Wagner knew that.

And they came here to help.

From different countries and different backgrounds, they came to contribute to peace. And with the scars of war still visible everywhere, the institutions in need of rebuilding, parties who had faced each other on the battlefield just two years previously now trying to form democratic coalitions, and refugees still displaced from their homes, they knew there were risks. And they came to help.

Twenty years later, an entire generation has grown to maturity. Sometimes it may seem that we are in a different country, a different world.

The peace that seemed so tenuous in 1997 has held now for more than two decades. There is freedom of movement throughout the country, a single currency, a single army, and institutions provided for in the peace agreement have been established – to give just a few examples.

And while political and constitutional disputes too often distract the country's leaders from bringing the country prosperity and political stability, we should not take for granted that these conflicts play out exclusively in the political arena.

These are the achievements of the first years of the peace process, to which the colleagues we honour today made an indelible contribution.

For those of us in the international community still working to support the country on its path to prosperity and security, their sacrifice reminds us of the responsibility to do everything we can to carry their contribution forward.

We will not forget it. And we will not forget them.