



ADDRESS

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PRESIDENT

Arusha, The Hague, 11 July 2016

Judge Theodor Meron President, Mechanism for International Criminal Tribunals Srebrenica Commemoration 11 July 2016

Little more than a week ago, a great man, Elie Wiesel, passed away. A survivor of the Holocaust, this outspoken activist and Nobel laureate spent more than a half-century advocating for human rights and human dignity, seeking to end injustice and cruelty, and fighting to overcome indifference, which he referred to as the most insidious danger of all. He was also, as some of you may recall, one of the leading voices appealing to world leaders to bring an end to the horrific violence and destruction that gripped this region in the 1990s.

Wiesel drew upon his experience as a Holocaust survivor in all that he did. This was not, for Wiesel, a choice. As he wrote, “[f]or the survivor who chooses to testify, it is clear: his duty is to bear witness for the dead and for the living.” But this focus on the importance of memory is not solely the responsibility of survivors. As Wiesel explained in 2009, “[m]emory has become a sacred duty of all people of goodwill.”

The extraordinary power of memory and the sacred duty to uphold it have been much in my thoughts in coming here today. For as we gather here, paying our solemn respects to the fathers and husbands, brothers and sons, and all of the other victims of the horrifying events at Srebrenica, we are not only paying tribute to the thousands of individuals who were deeply loved and who have tragically been lost. By returning to this place year after year, to this stark sea of marble and remembrance, we are also building an extraordinary monument to memory, and upholding the profound duty of which Wiesel spoke.

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The work of a court such as the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia and its successor, the Mechanism for International Criminal Tribunals, also contributes in meaningful ways to the preservation of memory.

By seeking to hold individuals accountable, courts such as these embody the condemnation of the international community for the heinous acts at issue and the commitment of that community to ensuring that justice, and not vengeance or violence, shall prevail.

By carrying out their proceedings fairly and in accordance with the highest international legal principles, these courts demonstrate a devotion to the very best of humanity—even as they address cases involving the very worst.

By conducting their trials and appeals publicly, and by preserving and making accessible an unparalleled collection of evidence, these courts create a vital record of our collective history.

And by issuing measured, principled rulings in accordance with the law and the evidence, these courts are contributing to the preservation and force of memory as well. As the Appeals Chamber of the ICTY stated unequivocally in 2004 in the case against Radislav Krstić, “the law condemns, in appropriate terms, the deep and lasting injury inflicted, and calls the massacre at Srebrenica by its

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proper name: genocide. Those responsible will bear this stigma, and it will serve as a warning to those who may in future contemplate the commission of such a heinous act.”

The judgement in that case and the more recent judgement in the case against Zdravko Tolimir are just two of the scores of judgements rendered by the ICTY, each a testament to the international community’s commitment to accountability and the rule of law. But the sacred duty of which Elie Wiesel spoke is far greater than a single court or a single judgement. This duty belongs to all of us: to all people of goodwill as Wiesel said.

And so, as we gather here today, I pay tribute to groups like the Mothers of Srebrenica and the Association of Victims and Witnesses of Genocide and to all those women and men who—like Wiesel—have done so much to preserve the memory of what happened here, to speak out against indifference or denial, and to do their utmost to ensure that future generations shall learn from our terrible past and never again repeat it.

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