



UNITED NATIONS

International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals

The International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals ("Mechanism") was established on 22 December 2010 by the United Nations Security Council to continue the jurisdiction, rights, obligations and essential functions of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda ("ICTR") and the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia ("ICTY") which closed in 2015 and 2017, respectively.

STATEMENT

PROSECUTOR

(Exclusively for the use of the media. Not an official document)

The Hague, 11 July 2020

25th commemoration of the Genocide in Srebrenica Video statement by the Mechanism Chief Prosecutor Serge Brammertz The Hague, 11 July 2020

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, dear Friends,

Today we are gathering to remember the thousands of fathers, brothers and sons murdered twenty-five years ago.

While we can only be together in spirit, we are also not alone. Around the world many will pause today to honour the memory of Srebrenica.

The Srebrenica genocide was one of the darkest moments in recent history. Another genocide in the heart of Europe, just two generations after the Holocaust.

The world saw senior leaders use propaganda to ignite ethnic hatred, and to dehumanize their neighbors. Men at the apex of power used that power to terrorize and destroy, simply because the victims were Muslims.

We know the result. The lives of more than 7,000 men and boys extinguished. 35,000 women, children and elderly terrorised and forced from their homes. A community deeply tied to the land simply eliminated.

My first visit to Srebrenica in 2010 marked me deeply.

I spent many hours with the victims and survivors. They told me their stories, and showed me the last photographs of their loved ones. We talked about the discrimination and fear returnees still face today. And they told me of their fears for the future, for their grand-children and great-grandchildren.

Through all of our time together, the Mothers of Srebrenica taught me an important lesson.

For most of the world, Srebrenica is something that happened twenty-five years ago.

But for the victims and survivors, their lives stopped twenty-five years ago. And the genocide remains at the center of their reality.



That is the true measure of the pain genocide inflicts. To destroy a group is to create an emptiness that can never be filled again.

It has been my honour as Chief Prosecutor of the ICTY and now the Mechanism to work closely with the victims of Srebrenica and victims throughout the former Yugoslavia in the fight for justice.

In the courtroom I have seen survivors of the genocide confront those who tried to kill them. I have seen mothers relive their darkest moments so that the world will know their pain. And I have seen how even the most powerful of men can be brought low by the voices of their victims.

Through the testimonies of the victims and survivors, the ICTY concluded beyond any reasonable doubt that genocide was committed in Srebrenica. International judges have confirmed that the genocide was planned at the highest levels of political and military leadership, with the aim to eliminate the Bosniak Muslim population of Srebrenica. A number of these senior leaders have been convicted for their crimes.

I will never forget when Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladic were arrested. It was an important achievement for international justice. But even more, I felt that in some small way, we had more fully lived up to the victims' expectations of us.

Dear Friends,

This commemoration should not only be about the past. To truly honour the memory of those lost twenty-five years ago, and to recognize the victims and survivors with us today, it is our responsibility to keep fighting for justice and the truth.

Five years ago, I spoke at the United Nations on the 20th anniversary of the genocide. My message was in part a call to confront genocide denial.

As I said then, "To respect the past, we must call Srebrenica by its name, genocide. To build the future, we must speak out with one voice when it is denied."

Unfortunately, genocide denial and glorification of convicted war criminals are even more rampant today than they were five years ago.

Just a few weeks ago posters celebrating Ratko Mladic and the so-called liberation of Srebrenica were posted in Bratunac and Srebrenica itself.

Schoolbooks in Bosnia and elsewhere in the region don't tell the truth of the genocide.

Political leaders – particularly in the Republika Srpska and Serbia – continue to deny the genocide.

The more extreme call it a hoax or myth, while those trying to maintain some semblance of sophistication debate legal concepts like pseudo-scholars.

This must be stopped.

For too long the international community has hoped that this problem will simply go away. It will not.



By continuing to tolerate genocide denial, in any form, we are failing the victims of Srebrenica again, like we did twenty-five years ago.

All of us should enforce a zero-tolerance policy when it comes to genocide denial, just as we do with racism and other forms of discrimination.

And the victims' pleas for laws repressing genocide denial deserve much more consideration and support.

So in conclusion, let us mark this 25th anniversary of the Srebrenica genocide with not only words, but action.

That would be a truly fitting tribute to the victims and survivors, and the memory of Srebrenica.

Thank you for allowing me to join you today.
