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The Cordoba Foundation
Cultures in Dialogue.

SREBRENICA 20 YEARS ON...

*Reflections on the 20th Anniversary
of the Srebrenica Genocide*

Dr Sejad Mekic | Nijaz Hlivnjak

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The Cordoba

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Cultures in Dialogue.

The Cordoba Foundation is an independent strategic think tank that works to promote intercultural dialogue and positive coexistence, through a range of activities including research and publications, training and capacity building, policy briefings and dialogues. The Foundation takes its name from the city of Cordoba. The European metropolis was once a symbol of human excellence and intellectual ingenuity, where cultures, civilisations and ideas thrived. Embodying this spirit, TCF today facilitates the meeting of minds, to advance understanding and respect for one another.



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"We appreciate the efforts of many like the East London Mosque and The Cordoba Foundation for supporting Bosnia over the years. This period of the year is especially difficult for us because of the vivid memories of the atrocity of 1995. However, we must learn to live with one another; we must be optimistic, have hope in a better future for tomorrow. //

Husain Kasavovic, Grand Mufti of Bosnia-Herzegovina, speaking at a reception at the London Muslim Centre, 5th July 2015, in commemoration of the 20th anniversary of the Srebrenica genocide.



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DR ABDULLAH FALIQ

WELCOME

WELCOME to this special edition of the *Cordoba Papers*, which is dedicated to Srebrenica. This week, and in particular 11th July, marks the 20th anniversary of the largest genocide in Europe since the Holocaust. Among other atrocities, more than 8,000 Muslim men and boys were massacred in less than one week in Srebrenica by Bosnian Serb forces. This transpired despite Srebrenica being declared a UN protected area (safe haven). Such was the scale of the massacre that it rendered the town and its surrounding areas virtually without its male population.

The Cordoba Foundation has been collaborating with various NGOs and institutions, as well as directly working with the Islamic community of Bosnia-Herzegovina, for many years to generate greater awareness about Srebrenica and to offer support to Bosnians via a range of initiatives and activities. These have included sending delegations to Bosnia (usually coinciding each year on 11th July Srebrenica memorial), as well as supporting charities and raising funds for specific projects inside Bosnia.

In addition, we assisted in the campaign which resulted in the European Parliament's recognition of the Srebrenica massacre in 2009. We have promoted the Grand Mufti's Friday sermon, which each year is dedicated to Srebrenica, and have organised numerous discussions and symposiums, as well as conducted research and organised media campaigns. Finally, we have produced and promoted literature concerning post-conflict societies, peace-building, inter-religious dialogue, and human rights issues.

Indeed, we are indebted to the Bosnia Cultural Exchange Forum, plus the London Muslim Centre, the Islamic Forum of Europe and the Muslim Council of Britain for their support over the years in delivering all the above. We also welcome recent efforts internationally, chiefly the British government, in expressions of support and solidarity for Srebrenica - which sadly was not the case only a few years ago as the cries of the Bosnians fell on deaf years.

Continuing our support and solidarity with the fallen in Bosnia, this issue of the *Cordoba Papers* features two important papers which were originally presented at a reception for the Grand Mufti of Bosnia on the 5th of July, 2015 at the London Muslim Centre at the invitation of Remembering Srebrenica. The first paper by Dr Sejad Mekic looks at the roots of the Bosnian genocide; the second by Nijaz Hlivjak, critiques the effectiveness of the various anniversary ceremonies for Srebrenica over the years and argues, through the voice of a surviving genocide friend, for a more robust stand against hatred.

We hope you will find this issue of the *Cordoba Papers* enriching and refreshing. Thank you.



DR ANAS ALTIKRITI

FOREWORD

MUCH has been said about Srebrenica as we commemorate the 20th anniversary of the genocide, and much more will undoubtedly be said in anniversaries to come. However, what must stand out as a grim unspeakable truth every single year is that the slaughter of more than 8000 Bosnian Muslims on the 11th of July, 1995 signifies the absolute capacity of humans to commit the most grotesque crimes against their fellow beings.

While most of us look 20 years back and shudder at the crime the international community allowed it to be committed whilst we watched, we conveniently overlook, that as we do so, thousands more face similar fates all around the world, where hatred, division, fear and inhumanity prevail.

Srebrenica will always be about the 8000 plus victims, and the families and legacies they left behind, but the challenge we face is to make Srebrenica about us. The legacy of Srebrenica must be that we all stand up, reject hatred, uproot fear and dispel division; otherwise another Srebrenica is never far away.

When The Cordoba Foundation was established in 1995, and immediately took on the 10th anniversary of Srebrenica as its first fully-fledged project, its message of dialogue between cultures was crystallised. Seeing the scars and speaking with those left behind to mourn underscored the importance for us all to engage in dialogue, to reduce the risks that such horrors might be repeated.

So let us make a week in which we remember Srebrenica, as well as the victims of the 7/7 bombings in London, and reflect upon how we, how our societies, and how our governments are behaving in respect to confronting hatred, division and fear.

Dr Anas Altikriti

CHIEF EXECUTIVE
THE CORDOBA FOUNDATION

REMEMBERING SREBRENICA: THE ROOTS OF THE BOSNIAN GENOCIDE

*Dr Sejad Mekic

THE terrible events of July 1995 in and around the medieval town of Srebrenica in Bosnia-Herzegovina is shocking and appalling to all decent people. It stains Europe's conscience with shame as the international community failed to protect the innocent and vulnerable people against the vicious hatred and violence perpetrated by the aggressors. On that afternoon, July the 11th 1995, the UN promises fell through as the genocide unfolded. The then commander of the Bosnian Serb Army, Gen Ratko Mladić, entered Srebrenica and triumphantly declared to a Bosnian Serb television crew that he was going to take revenge for the "rebellion of the Dahijas," an 1804 Serb uprising in the Srebrenica area that had been brutally suppressed by the Ottoman Turks who ruled the region at the time.

Local Serb residents were also eager to take revenge for raids by Bosnian Muslims from inside the enclave. Fearing a massacre, 15,000 men leave the enclave and embark on a desperate 63-mile journey to the nearest safe (Muslim) territory. On 12 July, Mladić's troops begin shelling 'The Column' of 15,000 men travelling through the mountains; blocked roads; carried out ambushes; and used stolen UN vehicles and uniforms to trick Bosnian Muslims into surrendering. After five days of fleeing through the mountains, the first survivors of *The Column* arrived in a safe territory with thousands being killed during the journey – only 3,000 survived.

In the inferno of Srebrenica, as in the Nazi camps of Hitler, the innocent faces clearly stood out against the ruthless hatred of the criminals. But so too stood out the shameful indifference of powerful world rulers for whose help the victims cried. The world stood by and watched the massacre of over 8,000 men and boys at Srebrenica in the name of "ethnic cleansing". As Yusuf Islam (AKA Cat Stevens) remarked, "on that day the only escape for the victims of Srebrenica was to return to God and hear the eternal greeting of Peace." So many were affected by the Srebrenica genocide, we hold in our prayers those who died, those whose remains are still to be identified and those who mourn such a great loss. Perhaps it should be pointed out that the resilient women of Srebrenica continue to live side-by-side with war criminals who slaughtered their family members. Many go through the raw pain of discovering that another bone of their loved ones had been uncovered in a different grave, many years after burial. All this tells us that we indeed must confront religious and historical prejudices which lead to this unspeakable massacres, so that it never happens again. And, without remembering we cannot hope to learn.

Srebrenica, like the Holocaust, the Rwanda, Kosova, Kashmir and Burma, is a moral responsibility without compromise.

Srebrenica, like the Holocaust, the Rwanda, Kosova, Kashmir and Burma, is a moral responsibility without compromise. It must always be a warning to the entire human family.

The Bosnian genocide (1991-1995) was an event when the human blood-filled history found such a solution in a modern state, in the centre of a civilised world – to register, mark, isolate, humiliate, gather and kill human beings just because they belong to a specific ethnic group, race and/or religion. The concept of racial ideology and racial hierarchy is a threat not only to the Bosnian and Kosova Muslims who live in Europe but to the entire human race – and is threat to world peace.

Many have rightly observed that genocide is a gradual process, the seeds of which are sown when social and cultural differences are not celebrated, but used as reasons to exclude or marginalise. All the experiences from the Bosnian genocide contain very important information about the society we live in. Bosnia is a potent reminder that in the ‘civilised’ 1990s human evil triumphed once again on European soil. As human beings, we are all capable of nesting under the darkest shades of human nature. All we can do is try our best to create conditions which enable our goodness to over-power the base callings of evil. It is precisely because we have failed to do this that Palestine, Bosnia, Kosova, Kashmir, Burma, and other places with similar fate all remain relevant.

The late Nelson Mandela had rightly observed: “No one is born hating another person because of the colour of his skin, or his background or his religion. Rather people learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, then they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite.” According to Professor Stanley Milgram, crimes are not in large numbers appointed by their personal character, but crimes are in large numbers appointed to the relations between the government and their ways to rule. Moreover, “The bigger the physical and psychological distance between the perpetrators, the easier it is to commit the crime,” explains Milgram. But, in the case of the Bosnian genocide knowing your victim in person did not suggest there to be emotional obligations towards one another. And hence the Bosnian genocide cannot be explained using “Milgram’s theory of nearness”. In the Genocide inflicted on the Bosnian Muslims, the perpetrator endeavoured to identify his victim as a vision of his neighbour, teacher or even a colleague from work and thereby committing, what some scholars of genocide call, ‘complete’ or worst possible genocide.

The Bosnian and other similar genocides concern not only those affected at the time, but affect the survivors who live in a society where distance and mutual accusation of the ‘Other’ is something that did not disappear in 1945, 1995 nor in 1999. No genocide, including Srebrenica 1995, is an unfortunate incident in human history. Genocides happen because some “human beings” chose the possibility in which mass killing is accommodated and tolerated. The Srebrenica genocide was a governmental undertaking – all planned and executed using the bureaucratic structure. Specific groups of people sitting in their respective cabinets in Belgrade signed the “Memorandum”, to create “Ram” and other evil plans.

We should also underline that most genocide scholars consider *genocide denial* to be the final stage of genocide. Therefore, we are not surprised by the hypocrisy of certain political subjects that deny or seek to understate and belittle the genocide. This is particularly obvious in the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina where the aggressors and their collaborators have continuously denied both the aggression and genocide. Every attempt was made to conceal and even falsify the truth of their crimes.

Moreover, the perpetrators are very incisive in making a scientifically founded approach to research and the acquisition of scientific truths or facts about the genocide very hard, almost impossible. The scientific research carried out so far on Srebrenica and other Bosnian massacres have been reduced to the discovery, identification and documentation of excess death victims.

The fact that the Bosnian genocide happened after the international codification of genocide must not be ignored. Those who were in a position to prevent the Srebrenica tragedy but did not failed the test of history. This is why Srebrenica will forever remain the ugly spot on the face of the international community – and in particular Europe. If there is a grain of comfort for the mothers, daughters and sisters of Srebrenica in this world, then it is that the criminals will face justice. But once again, the victims of Srebrenica had been made to wait far too long for justice.

It is not an exaggeration to say that the genocide of Srebrenica remains a defining tragedy of our times. Keeping alive the memory of the crimes committed in July 1995 is just part of what is owed to the victims and the communities that mourn them. Most of the civilised world -- including the UK in 2013 -- has, albeit late, called the Srebrenica genocide the biggest crime in Europe since the Holocaust. But, in the Serb Entity (within Bosnia-Herzegovina) that truth is yet to be acknowledged.

Remembering painful truths about the past is the key to our shared quest for a better and more tolerant world. The lessons of Srebrenica are indeed many and they must go beyond 'never again'. Srebrenica should underscore the importance of building stability, reconciliation and a culture of peaceful coexistence.

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Speech delivered at the London Muslim Centre on 5th July, 2015, a reception for the Grand Mufti of Bosnia-Herzegovina, His Excellency Husein Kavazovic as part of the 20th Anniversary of the Srebrenica Genocide.

Srebrenica Genocide Picture Highlights



PHOTOS COURTESY OF JASMIN AGOVIĆ, SARAJEVO - BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

WORKING FOR GREATER RECOGNITION OF THE SREBRENICA GENOCIDE

*Nijaz Hlivnjak

“Do not say for those who are slain in the way of God “they are dead. No, (they are) alive but you (do) not perceive.” - QUR’AN

GERMAN Jewish intellectual Walter Benjamin, once said that not even the dead will be safe from the enemy, if he is victorious. Today, this enemy has not ceased to be victorious.

Benjamin was actually challenging Plato’s argument that only those who died are able to see the end of the war. Instead, Benjamin claims that war is permanent and that not even death spares the human from the effects of war. In fact, most wars are waged in the name of those who died before.

To elucidate further, glance for instance in the readers’ comments on a recent article in *The Guardian* by Ed Vulliamy: people write that Serbs killed Muslims in Srebrenica to allegedly avenge the ancestors of Bosnian Muslims who had been involved in the Nazi SS division and were allegedly taking Serbs to the concentration camps. Other comments include preposterous characterisation of Srebrenica Muslims as members of the so called Islamic State in Syria and Iraq – although the group did not even exist then.

In the aforementioned claims, what we see is simply a war of baseless arguments and character-assassination as a desperate attempt to justify what Mladic and others did in Srebrenica. This is the reality which sadly perpetuates the continuation of the bloody war that started in 1992.

Today, we fail to see repentance from the aggressors who committed the genocide in Srebrenica; no respect for the victims; no reconciliation and ultimately no real acknowledgment of the Genocide. What remains for us is to be committed to an earnest struggle to establish the truth concerning the greatest evil in the heart of Europe following the Second World War.

For those who continue to deny the Genocide, they are in reality continuing the torture of those whose lives are already been taken away. Each and every BUT that is pronounced to deny or justify the Genocide is like a sword in the hearts of the victims of Srebrenica. The dead are subjected to this pain in the same way their surviving loved ones endure the pain today. The feeling is indescribable.

My friend Jasmin Jusufovic was only nine years old in July 1995. Unlike his father, uncle and other members of his family who were killed, my friend was spared the death camps. He was lucky because he was very thin and a small boy then. Today, Jusufovic is a very successful economist and poet, he wrote this message exclusively for the audience tonight (reception for Grand Mufti of Bosnia on 5th July 2015, London Muslim Centre).

“After battling for 18 years with the thought that my father’s remains might never be found, two years ago I finally got my moment of closure and have had a chance to bury

Talks about Srebrenica Genocide have wrongly been aimed at reminding the survivors (ironically) of what they have survived, hence dehumanising them into plain, shallow, disposable attribute of a victim.

my father's remains in a proper resting place. And just as I thought that I had battled the worst that there could be, I saw a label on my father's casket saying that his remains were collected from six different secondary and/or tertiary mass graves. Sadly, my closure fast faded away forever, silenced by the sound of bulldozers breaking through human bones.

Still I don't hate. I do not know how to hate. I was a learning child when I felt on my own being what it meant to be hated, I've seen shouting human faces disfigured with hate.

Srebrenica, transcends from a simple town name into a synonym for an unimaginable tragedy to some, a heavy burden of guilt to others. It is indeed a symbol of a bitter medicine of shame for Europe and the world which betrayed its own old promise of "never again" – an indelible impression on my life. I, believing that I speak for the majority of survivors, therefore don't find much of a closure in a constant talking and reminders of what I (we) have survived. Sadly, I feel that for the past decades talks about Srebrenica Genocide have wrongly been aimed at reminding the survivors (ironically) of what they have survived, hence dehumanising them into plain, shallow, disposable attribute of a victim.

But, I am not advocating that we should stop these remembrance events and functions. Rather, what I am saying is that we need to up the stakes and really focus on the aims of our activities and deliberations. When I tell you my story, I don't need your sympathy, which ends once you return to your own daily chores. I want your eyes opened for when you return home you should remain alert and oppose hatred wherever it emanates from. We have been mingling in a meaningless sympathy for Srebrenica for decades, and since then we just keep counting and counting heads of the fallen.

We need to raise our voices about Srebrenica, because it might be a chance for humanity to see their blood-thirsty selves in a mirror. That thirst is never satisfied, and it always brings sadness.

We have to be aware about Srebrenica every single moment to know that hatred is not an abstract, that hatred lurks in our neighbours' houses, and even under our own skin. We need to battle hatred from within us first. In this blessed month of Ramadan, let us take the opportunity to invite each other to reflect, to draw wisdom that running to satisfy one's own thirst is not as much rewarding as turning our thirst into fasting."

I thank you all for listening to our plight -- the loss of and sufferings of the people of Srebrenica. Let us work and pray for a better future where such unspeakable events are not meted out against another people.

Speech delivered at the London Muslim Centre on 5th July, 2015, a reception for the Grand Mufti of Bosnia-Herzegovina, His Excellency Husein Kavazovic as part of the 20th Anniversary of the Srebrenica Genocide.

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FOREWORD BY

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