

# Srebrenica Genocide Will Not Be Forgotten

*"You have suffered great persecution in the war. You are free to forgive or not the evildoers. Whatever you do, but don't forget the genocide. Because a forgotten genocide is repeated."*

*Alija Izetbegović*

Alija Izetbegović, the first president of independent Bosnia and Herzegovina, uttered these words making a call not to forget the Srebrenica genocide, which was one of the greatest massacres of human history. One of the bloodiest stages of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina lived on July 11, 1995, in Srebrenica which is located in the east of the country and with a majority of Muslim/Bosnian population.

In Srebrenica having witnessed the greatest genocide in Europe after World War II, 8,372 innocent Bosnian Muslims under United Nations (UN) peacekeeping force protection were slaughtered by the Serbs, just because of their religious and national identity. In addition, hundreds of women and little girls were raped during the war. Tens of thousands of people who took refuge in Srebrenica which was declared as a "safe zone" were forcibly removed from the city.

The responsibility of this genocide against the civilians under the "protection" of the Dutch troops in the UN peacekeeping mission in Europe is still not punished. The recent court ruling on Dutch soldiers guilty of genocide is inadequate, despite a positive development. Because the Dutch UN peacekeeping troops were judged to be responsible for the deaths of only 300 people in the massacre of at least 8,372 people who lost their lives.

On the other side, the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) decided for the Serb Commander Ratko Mladic which was the head of genocide with the nickname of "Bosnian Butcher". ICTY ruled on 22 November 2017 that the events in Srebrenica were actually a genocide and Mladic was responsible for the civilian attacks in the capital city Sarajevo between 1992-1995, including this genocide, and sentenced to life imprisonment. However, these decisions taken too late would neither lead to reducing the suffering of the genocide nor would it increase the belief in the justice.

## A Peace March with the Cries of Death

Marş Mira (The March of Peace) is the activity where participants are walking in the opposite direction of the forest road that innocent Bosnians who wanted to escape from the genocide in Srebrenica used to reach Tuzla, the safe zone. The purpose of the march of peace is to make the feelings of the innocent people who have escaped from the massacre to be felt to some extent and to ensure that this genocide realized in the middle of Europe is not forgotten.

As part of the 14<sup>th</sup> March of Peace this year, participants walked an average of 35 km per day to reach Srebrenica on July 11th. On July 8 the participants, who set out from the town of Nežak, spent the night in predetermined campsites. In these camps was given pieces of information about the genocide and those who passed through this route, known as the "road of death" among the people in 1995, explained what they had gone through.

Although it is not as meaningful as this march between Nežak and Srebrenica, in many cities around the world people are marching on July 11th in the name of remembering the Srebrenica genocide. In different cities of Turkey, many marches were organized in this context.

## Moto Marathon Srebrenica

Another event organized for the last seven years on behalf of the Srebrenica genocide is the Moto-Marathon Srebrenica. This marathon, in which many motorists from different countries are participating, begins on July 9th in Bihać, the west of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Last year, IHH organized an activity under the name of Moto-Bosna to participate in the marathon. 23 bikers who came to Istanbul from different cities of Turkey participated in the events at Srebrenica by covering 1,500 km of roads in four days.

This year eight independent bikers from Turkey went to Srebrenica to attend the commemoration activities.

### **Burial of Identified Victims**

At least 8,372 innocent civilians slaughtered in the Srebrenica genocide are known to be buried in mass graves. After the end of the war, the Bosnian State initiated work to uncover these graves.

The tombs that could not be found with technology were found with the help of nature. Flowers, which had not been seen before, started to blossom in the district after the massacre. At the same time, blue butterflies emerged which were fed only with these flowers. Until today, hundreds of mass spectacles have been achieved, resulting in the excavation of places where these butterflies are seen intensely.

The number of victims buried in the Potocari Monument Cemetery near the Srebrenitsa brought out from the mass graves was 6610. This number reveals that the presence of mass graves still unreachable throughout the country.

Like every year, the convoy carrying the sacrifices of the victims whose identities were identified this year was met with prayers and tears by the people in all the past routes. Moving on July 9th with 35 funerals from the town of Visoko in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the convoy then passed through Sarajevo to Potocari. At the commemoration ceremony on July 11, the victims were buried in the Potocari Monument Cemetery.

### **Today's Srebrenitsa**

In Srebrenica, which had a population around 36,600 before the genocide, Bosniaks constituted 75% of the population. After many years, in the population census conducted in 2013, it turned out that the city's total population declined to 13.400 and the proportion of Bosniaks declined to 54%. According to official figures, although the city population is shown around, it is known that the real figure is below this. The reason for this is the Dayton Agreement, which was made after the war and was not a peace treaty but a ceasefire agreement and as the agreement cannot solve the problems, has become a problem in itself.

The uncertain environment created by the agreement in Bosnia and Herzegovina is causing young people to migrate heavily out of the country. This migration movement is not only specific to Srebrenica, but also for all other cities. According to some unofficial reports, 7 out of every 10 students are migrating abroad.

The "uncertain environment", which is the reason for young people to emigrate out of Bosnia and Herzegovina, is a three-headed political system of the country which is formulated by the Dayton Agreement and which doesn't guarantee a stable future which is one of the most important issues for new investments. No new jobs are created due to low investments in the country. Especially, finding a job for the young population is getting harder every day.

In addition to the inability to create new employment areas, another problem of the country is also chronicled corruption. The corruption networks established by some parties in the country for many years have profoundly influenced politics and the economy. It is a fact known by everyone that the parties are staffed at all levels and that most of the publicly owned companies are under the great control of them. One of the most important reasons for not being able to obviate corruption is that there is no effective justice mechanism in the country and that the other parties do not give enough support for it.

It is important to note that the bitter events in Srebrenica in 1995 and the effects of the Dayton Agreement are nothing less than genocide. Although it is believed that the problems arose from these developments would be resolved with the support of the European Union, it is the people in the region who are to relieve

the wounds of this tragic event by realizing the reason and ideology behind it and intending to establish a common future.