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**STOP GENOCIDE AND HOLOCAUST DENIAL;
CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS
IV INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE,
SARAJEVO, 20 AND 21 JUNE 2019**

The Association of Victims and Witnesses of Genocide, The Association-Movement Mothers of Srebrenica and Žepa Enclaves, Sarajevo, 2020, 283 pages

This book is a collection of articles and speeches contributed by the esteemed participants of the international conference that took place on the 20th and 21st June in Sarajevo. It is dedicated to the topic of genocide denial, with a special focus on the current denial of the Srebrenica genocide and the Holocaust. The Association of Victims and Witnesses of Genocide together with the Association-Movement Mothers of Srebrenica and Žepa Enclaves have organized the annual conference for the fourth time. To commemorate, to remember, to remind.

In 2019, the conference coincided with the 24th anniversary of the Srebrenica genocide and the 50th anniversary of Holocaust remembrance. It commemorated both events, bringing together international professionals investigating and documenting genocide and Holocaust denial, representatives of the international community, non-government organizations, researchers, professors, as well as the genocide survivors and witnesses. In short, all people who



share the goal to make genocide and holocaust denial strictly prohibited and punishable by law. With this in mind, the conference once again pointed out the necessity of ethics and moral in international relations as well as in politics.

Emphasis was placed on the concept of genocide, which according to Dr. Gregory Stanton, President of Genocide Watch, has 10 stages (Petrla,

p.225). In the Introductory Remarks (2019, p.13), it is stressed that:

“[...] genocide denial is its last phase, as the genocide does not end with execution, persecution, rape and other crimes committed with genocidal intentions; it continues until the perpetrators and their followers are ready to face the past and accept the truth”.

This thought was repeated throughout the conference. It was approached by scholars, judges, prosecutors, victims and witnesses, each presenting their individual view. Their diverse backgrounds gave a very rich overview of the topic. Particularly valuable were the personal testimonies of victims and witnesses, which at times made the idea of genocide denial appear absurd. A similar observation was made by professor Lipstadt (2019, p.97), stating that “[t]here are facts, there are opinions, and there are lies”, blatantly calling out genocide and holocaust denial lies bordering on ridicule. The conference played an important role in countering those lies.

The aim of the forum in Sarajevo was to reveal the current principle deniers, their strategies, capacities and methodology. Additionally, to understand the best methods in tackling this final stage of genocide. For this purpose, several panels were formed to discuss the different topics, and numerous contributions were pre-

sented to overview and research the topic discussed.

The symposium was opened with welcoming remarks by the president of Mothers of Srebrenica and Žepa enclaves and a Member of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina. It continued with speeches by the President, Chief Prosecutor, and Registrar of the IRMCT, and the UN Secretary-General’s Special Advisor on the Prevention of Genocide. Afterward, Panel I began deliberating on the concepts of genocide and Holocaust denial, their functions and motives today. It offered a broad perspective on the concept, featuring experts on the Jewish culture and history, and on the tragic past of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Panel II welcomed representatives of the international community, offering their comparative insight and big picture view. An important topic were the lessons drawn from Germany and its approach to Holocaust denial (Bećirović, 2019, pp. 107-111). Furthermore, the roles of the Office of the High Representative (OHR), the European Parliament (EP), the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and the ICTY/IRMCT were emphasized. The latter was also featured in Panel III, discussing the Legacy of the International Tribunal. The IRMCT Registrar Olufemi Elias (2019, p. 56) highlighted the importance of decisions taken by the Tribunal in his opening speech:

“By hiding what happened on those days, by tampering with history, the deniers are creating space for the perpetrators of genocide to go unpunished and for history to repeat itself. [...] Memory, aided by facts established beyond reasonable doubt, accessible to everyone, is our best shield against denial and revisionism to ensure that accountability and justice prevail over evil ideology.”

Indeed, ICTY/IRMCT decisions and judgments taken beyond reasonable doubt are essential in establishing the true facts about the events that took place between 1992 and 1995 in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Additionally, these decisions and documents must be available openly to the public, for them to have their full effect in countering the deliberate spread of misinformation. It has to be documented, with a clear goal to be prevented.

Panel IV was dedicated to the honest truths of victims and witnesses of genocide, while Panel V approached the methods and goals of denial, calling out the key actors by name. This is an especially important topic, as it includes the sensitive issue of primary school education (Kolarić, 2019, p. 212), where revisionism can cause incredible damage and continue to feed disparities in the generations to come. Among the names, The Republic of Serbia and the entity Republika Srpska were most often mentioned. To them, the President of the IRMCT

(Agius, 2019, p. 40) addressed the following:

“I have a message for the leaders of Republika Srpska who have been actively attempting to distort the truth of the genocide for two and a half decades: You have not succeeded, otherwise you would not be intensifying your efforts now. And you will continue to fail.”

The final Panel VI addressed the currently most common tool of the so-called deniers – the media. It already played an important role in documenting the Holocaust, genocides in Rwanda, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and the United States. Still today, it continues to report and inform the broader public about certain court proceedings. On the other hand, when abused, it serves as a powerful means to distribute false information and distort the truth.

The conference was completed by a set of conclusions and demands adopted unanimously by the Conclusion Commission. The first and most important one was a call to all deniers to stop with revisionism, the glorifying of war criminals and war crimes. Instead, they must accept and respect the verdicts of the international courts. This is, plainly speaking, what we call the rule of law. And the rule of law is institutionalized justice.

Furthermore, a demand was placed

on the authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina to increase their efforts in putting an end to denial. For this reason, the Parliamentary Assembly of BiH was called upon to pass the Law on the Prohibition of Genocide and Holocaust Denial or alternatively, the Office of the High Representative should impose it.

The next demand was to the international community, which must ensure regional cooperation in the prosecution of war criminals. The BiH judicial bodies are requested to begin adopting the legacy of the ICTY/IRMCT and implementing the recommendations and reports by international institutions, associations of victims and NGOs. Lastly, the educational authorities must include the history of the said war in school curriculums in accordance with the ICTY/IRMCT legacy.

Today, the law incriminating genocide denial has not yet been implemented in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the discussion on denial remains as relevant as it was at the time of the conference. Perhaps, this is the most important time to remember its keynote message (Agius, 2019, p. 44):

“we must leave no stone unturned in our efforts to isolate the deniers. They will continue to lie, but in time, through our efforts, they will be diminished. History is on the side of justice, and we will prevail.”

Indeed, the final message is one of hope. As the Association of Victims and Witnesses of Genocide and the organization Mothers of Srebrenica and Žepa Enclaves together with the conference participants continue to speak the truth, so the deniers are active in their attempts of revisionism. For this reason, the publication of selected articles and transcripts of the most esteemed experts and most knowledgeable victims and witnesses remains an invaluable source of information and wisdom. A beacon of light to do away with all that is false and humbly welcome reconciliation. Their messages are of even greater importance in the year in which we remember the 25th anniversary of both the genocide as well as the Dayton Peace Accords.