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International
Criminal Tribunal
for the Former
Yugoslavia

Tribunal Pénal
International pour
l'ex-Yougoslavie

STATEMENT

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The Hague, 1 July 2015

Srebrenica: Remembering and Honoring the Victims of Genocide Statement made by Serge Brammertz, Chief Prosecutor International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia New York, 1 July 2015

The greatest tragedies defy our capacity to describe them. The suffering, shame and despair overwhelm us. So we express countless sorrows in a single word.

Srebrenica is one such word.

The tragedy of Srebrenica marked us all.

Here at the United Nations, we knew the shame of a promise that was broken. And we felt the helplessness of blue helmets who were witnesses to genocide.

I took office in 2008. My first meeting was with the Mothers of Srebrenica, led by Munira Subašić. We have met many times since, in The Hague, in Sarajevo, in Srebrenica.

She and the other mothers have helped me to know their past. They also helped me to understand the crucial importance of our present work. And the survivors drive us to achieve more than we ever thought was possible.

22. That is how many family members were stolen from Munira. She only buried her youngest son, Nermin, last year: two small bones to mark his name, his life, his community.

The tragedy of Srebrenica is the loneliness of the survivors.

Rows of gravestones that grow longer each year. Women holding aged photographs of their lost husbands and children. Quiet scenes in places where thousands of lives were extinguished in a summer's day.

A community destroyed. Lives broken. That is what it means to be a survivor of genocide.

It is a pain that only survivors know.

But even if we cannot know their pain, we know that it must be recognized.

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But sadly, some deny the genocide. They close their doors and their hearts to the survivors.

All of us must accept that in July 1995, thousands of men and boys were killed. That tens of thousands of women, children and elderly were terrorized, abused and forced from their homes.

All of us must accept that there was a deliberate plan to commit genocide. That a few men, trusted with the gravest responsibility, abused their rank, their authority and their power to destroy a community.

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.

The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia established these facts and delivered justice for Srebrenica, as well as for many other crimes.

20 years ago, there was only a hope for justice. Today, it is increasingly a reality.

Many of those who possessed great power and used it to inflict great suffering have been brought to stand before a higher power, an international court of justice.

15 have been convicted for crimes in Srebrenica. Two more - the two who most personified ethnic hatred and violence - are now awaiting their judgment. They hid from the victims for so many years, but the world community showed that there can be no refuge from justice.

Prevention must be our first priority. But when prevention fails, justice is essential.

Societies emerging from conflict need more justice, not less.

It will not be easy. And it will take time. But whether in the future there is accountability or impunity depends on the choices we make.

Too many victims - Albanian, Bosniak, Croat and Serb - are still waiting for justice in the former Yugoslavia.

National courts must continue the ICTY's work. International engagement is still needed to support them.

We have it in our power to show every single victim of the conflicts that justice can be done.

More than the words we offer today, that would be a truly fitting tribute to the victims of Srebrenica and other crimes in the former Yugoslavia.