

President Joseph R. Biden Jr.
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20500

May 12, 2021

Dear President Biden,

We are writing to you to express our grave concern about the severe impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where conditions are worsening. As of May 7, 2021, the Johns Hopkins University Coronavirus Resource Center reported that Bosnia's mortality rate was 4.4%, the 9th highest rate in the world.¹ CNN reported recently that the citizens of Sarajevo are perishing at a pace that is greater than during the siege, almost twice as many per day.² As of May 8, 2021, less than 1% of the population has been fully vaccinated.³ President Biden, based on your long-standing support of human rights and justice in Bosnia, we are reaching out to request your emergency provision of vaccines and logistical support to help Bosnia respond to this public health crisis.

Tragically, due to the political stalemate, which is caused, in part, by the administrative complexity of the Dayton Accords, and, in part, by efforts of Bosnian Serb and Bosnian Croat nationalist parties to undermine the central government and national sovereignty, Bosnia has been unable to respond effectively to the pandemic. Thus far, Bosnia has not been able to undertake an effective vaccination campaign, both due to vaccine shortages and to the lack of coordination on a national level. Bosnia was depending on the COVAX program, but there was a significant delay in receiving vaccines through COVAX due to bureaucratic complications created by the Dayton Accords. As a result, as High Representative Valentin Inzko stated in his May 4 report to the United Nations Security Council, vaccines have only been "trickling in" to Bosnia, with shipments coming from Russia, Serbia, Turkey, and most recently from the European Union.⁴

Yet even with these vaccine donations, a sustained and widespread vaccination campaign has not been possible. The High Representative also emphasized in his report to the UN Security Council that the challenges caused by the pandemic have only highlighted the problem of "dysfunctionality" in the country, a dysfunctionality that has delayed the "rollout of a coordinated immunization effort."⁵ For example, rather than focusing on the pandemic, the Bosnian Serb dominated entity of Republika Srpska has chosen this moment to promote the idea that it should secede from Bosnia as part of a so-called "peaceful dissolution". The Peace Implementation Council Steering Board that oversees the Office of the High Representative, condemned Republika Srpska's rhetoric as "divisive" and "irresponsible," as it was diverting attention that needs to be given to combatting COVID-19 in Bosnia.⁶

Again, we are imploring you to send Bosnia and Herzegovina COVID-19 vaccines in response to this public health and humanitarian crisis. We urge you to try to direct some quantity of available vaccine supplies from the United States, and if possible, to purchase additional vaccines specifically for Bosnia

as soon as possible.

Mr. President, we still remember your historic speech on the floor of the Senate December 13, 1995, in support of Bosnia, when you courageously stated the truth about the international aggression and the genocide, words that are still moving to hear or read today. We are heartened by the success of your vaccination campaign in the U.S., and hope you will be able to provide similar support to Bosnia that will save lives. The citizens of Bosnia do not deserve to be victimized any longer by a political stalemate fueled by ethno-nationalism, a stalemate that can be seen as the tragic legacy of the international aggression and genocide perpetrated against Bosnia from 1992-1995.

We would like to respectfully propose that if you are able to direct COVID-19 vaccines to Bosnia, that you consider coordinating with the Office of the High Representative in Sarajevo.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

The Working Group for Bosnia and Herzegovina,

Dr. David Pettigrew, Professor of Philosophy and Holocaust and Genocide Studies,
Southern Connecticut State University, Steering Committee, Yale Genocide Studies Program,
Kenan Arnautović, M.D., Ph.D., Neurosurgeon, Memphis, Tennessee,
Russ Carnahan, former United States Representative for Missouri's 3rd Congressional District,
Almira Delibegovic-Broome QC, Edinburgh, Scotland, UK,
Azem Dervišević, Business and Community Entrepreneur, Cambridge, MA,
Professor Tanya Domi, Columbia University, Harriman Institute,
Emir Festic, M.D., M.S., Professor of Medicine,
Damir Husamović, M. Econ, Community Activist, St. Louis, MO,
Dr. Adna Karamehić-Oates, Director, Center for Bosnian Studies, Fontbonne University,
Patrick McCarthy, Associate Dean of University Libraries, Director of Medical Center Library, St.
Louis University,
Mead Mišić, Esq., Attorney, Boston Massachusetts,
Amir Ovčina, Esq., Attorney, Chicago, Illinois,
Djenita Pasic, Esq., Attorney, Louisville, Kentucky

cc. The Honorable Antony Blinken, United States Secretary of State,
The Honorable Samantha Power, Administrator, United States Agency for International
Development,
The Honorable Eric Nelson, United States Ambassador to Bosnia and Herzegovina,
Ambassador Valentin Inzko, High Representative, Bosnia and Herzegovina

¹ "Mortality Analyses," *Johns Hopkins University & Medicine: Coronavirus Resource Center*, May 8, 2021, <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/data/mortality>.

² Antonia Mortensen and Scott McClean, "The Siege of Sarajevo lasted for years -- now the city's battle with Covid-19 is dragging on with no end in sight," *CNN*, May 1, 2021, <https://www.cnn.com/2021/05/01/europe/sarajevo-covid-siege-deaths-cmd-intl/index.html>.

³"Overview: Bosnia and Herzegovina," *Johns Hopkins University & Medicine: Coronavirus Resource Center*, May 8, 2021, <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/region/bosnia-and-herzegovina>

⁴ "59th report of the High Representative for Implementation of the Peace Agreement on Bosnia and Herzegovina to the Secretary-General of the United Nations," *OHR*, May 4, 2021, <http://www.ohr.int/59th-report-of-the-high-representative-for-implementation-of-the-peace-agreement-on-bosnia-and-herzegovina-to-the-secretary-general-of-the-united-nations/>.

⁵ "59th report of the High Representative for Implementation of the Peace Agreement on Bosnia and Herzegovina to the Secretary-General of the United Nations," *OHR*, May 4, 2021, <http://www.ohr.int/59th-report-of-the-high-representative-for-implementation-of-the-peace-agreement-on-bosnia-and-herzegovina-to-the-secretary-general-of-the-united-nations/>.

⁶ "Statement by the Peace Implementation Council Steering Board" *OHR*, April 26, 2021, <http://www.ohr.int/statement-by-the-peace-implementation-council-steering-board-2/>.