

Working Group for Bosnia and Herzegovina

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April 16, 2021

Your Excellency,

Thank you again for participating in our program: "Finishing the Work in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Ending Genocide Denial and the Glorification of War Criminals: A Conversation with Ambassador Dr. Valentin Inzko, High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina," on February 28. We are writing now to express our continuing concern about the escalation of genocide denial and the glorification of war criminals in the entity Republika Srpska.

We are indeed grateful for your recent initiative to remove the plaque for Radovan Karadžić from the student dormitory in Pale, as well as for your demand that the Assembly of Republika Srpska's rescind its recognition, in October 2016, of founding members of Republika Srpska, including Karadžić, Biljana Plavšić, and Momčilo Krajišnik.¹ Further, we are grateful that you have indicated your intention to impose a law against genocide denial and the glorification of war criminals, if such a law is not passed by the parliamentary processes of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Now, we understand your rationale for waiting to prohibit the glorification of certain convicted war criminals until the second instance verdict has been rendered as a final disposition. However, in the nearly five years since the abovementioned awards were conferred, for example, the glorification of war criminals and their atrocities have proliferated in the entity of Republika Srpska. This includes cases of glorification of war crimes that go beyond attachment of guilt to specific individuals, but need to be addressed due to their extreme damage to reconciliation prospects in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Some plaques and statues have glorified specific war criminals, such as the plaque for Ratko Mladić installed on Vraca Hill,² or the plaque for Karadžić. But many monuments, in Bijelina, Prijedor, Višegrad, and Trnopolje, for example, make vague references to the "defenders of Republika Srpska," "the fallen Serb fighters" or "fighters who lay the foundation of Republika Srpska."³ As these monuments are not dedicated to specific individuals, they are not subject to first or second order verdicts, and so, by your approach, they are not subject to removal. In the meantime, these and other monuments are colonizing the cultural landscape and are negatively affecting the consciousness of the next generation, as is evident by genocide denial and the glorification of war criminals by emerging leaders in Republika Srpska, such as Mladen Grujičić, and Draško Stanivuković, Bosnian Serb Mayors of Srebrenica and Banja Luka, respectively. But according to your rationale, these monuments will remain in place.

Widespread genocide denial and the proliferation of these plaques and statues in the entity Republika Srpska have contributed to the emergence of a culture of "triumphalism"--a term proposed by scholar Hariz Halilovich--as part of which the atrocities are not denied but rather celebrated.⁴ Such instances of triumphalism include, for example, T-shirts and banners bearing the images and names of war criminals, such as Ratko Mladić, as well as slogans evoking the terror of the Srebrenica genocide, including "Nož, žica, Srebrenica" [knife, barbed-wire, Srebrenica], a slogan that celebrates the binding of Srebrenica prisoners' wrists with barbed wire and their murder with a knife. Yet these phenomena that intimidate and insult survivors in violation of Annex 7 of the Dayton Peace Accords, and that contribute to revisionism and denial, are not subject to "second instance verdicts" so they will continue to proliferate with impunity.⁵

Another example of such memorials are the images and statues glorifying Četnik leader Draža Mihailović, a leader who is appropriated by contemporary Bosnian Serb ultranationalists in order to glorify atrocities committed from 1992 to 1995. Last year, a mural bearing the image of Mihailović appeared in Foča, and very recently, the City Assembly of Bijelina voted to build a memorial to Mihailović.

Even more recently, on April 12, 2021, Višegrad municipality held an official ceremony honoring Russian volunteers who died participating in atrocities committed by the so-called Army of Republika Srpska. In a perverse display of revisionism, the Minister of Labor and Veterans' and Disabled Protection of the Republic of Srpska, Duško Milunović, and Višegrad Mayor Mladen Đurević, glorified the Russian volunteers as heroes of the "patriotic defense" of Republika Srpska.⁶ We remind you that a Russian cross was installed in memory of the Russian volunteers on the hill above Višegrad in 2017.⁷

An entire generation of young people in Republika Srpska are growing up with the impression that the convicted war criminals are heroes. Genocide denial, the glorification of war criminals, and the celebration of the genocide, are clear indicators that the atrocities could be repeated.⁸ This is a matter of grave concern. Such denialist practices foreclose the possibility of restorative justice and deny the survivors a future.

Your excellency, this widespread culture of denial, glorification, and triumphalism must be condemned by your offices in the strongest possible terms. Monuments and plaques to the perpetrators should be removed. Public celebrations of the genocide at sporting events, for example, should be banned and criminalized. We urge you to take immediate action through your BONN Powers to rein in this culture of hate and provocation in the entity of Republika Srpska. We urge you, further, to establish a citizen's commission, including members of the diaspora, to document and publicly condemn instances of denial, glorification, and triumphalism with a public education campaign, and to prepare a plan for their removal. We stand prepared to assist you in this process.

Now that the House of Peoples has once again failed to pass the proposed law against genocide denial and the glorification of war criminals, we urge you to finally follow through on your promise to implement such a law in Bosnia.⁹ Your action in this regard would be a crucial step in reasserting the primacy of the rule of law in a post-genocide society, and in protecting survivors from further intimidation and trauma.

Sincerely,

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¹ See "Plaque with name of convicted war criminal Karadzic removed from student dorm, N1, December 10, 2020, <https://ba.n1info.com/english/news/a494162-plaque-with-name-of-convicted-war-criminal-karadzic-removed-from-student-dorm/>. Also see Danijel Kovacevic, Bosnian Serbs Given Deadline to Revoke War Criminals' Honours, *BalkanInsight*, February 3, 2021, <https://balkaninsight.com/2021/02/03/bosnian-serbs-given-deadline-to-revoke-war-criminals-honours/>. Also see a report on the original ceremony at which the recognitions were awarded: "Skupština NSRS dodijelila zahvalnice Karadžiću Plavšić, Krajišniku," *Klix*, October 24, 2016, <https://www.klix.ba/vijesti/bih/skupstina-nsrc-dodijelila-zahvalnice-karadzicu-plavsic-krajsniku/161024115>.

² "Na Vracama postavljena ploča u čast ratnog zločinca Ratka Mladića!," *Klix*, June 5, 2014, <https://www.klix.ba/vijesti/bih/na-vracama-postavljena-ploca-u-cast-ratnog-zlocinca-ratka-mladica/140605030>

³ See, for example, Edin Hajdarpasić, "Antifascism is not a monument" *The Disorder of Things*, July, 9, 2020, <https://thedisorderofthings.com/2020/07/09/antifascism-is-not-a-monument/>. Also see, "Preminuo vajar Miodrag Živković, tvorac spomenika na Tjentištu," *RTRS*, July 31, 2020, <https://lat.rtrs.tv/vijesti/vijest.php?id=395332> : "Danas Živkovićeви spomenici krase trgove u Brčkom - spomenik 'Srpskim braniocima Brčkog', Bijeljini - spomenik 'Borcima Bijeljine i Semberije, Prijedoru - spomenik 'Za Krst časni', Derventi - spomenik 'Borcima otadžbinskog rata', Modriči - spomenik 'Borcima za slobodu' i Mrkonjić Gradu -spomenik 'Braniocima otadžbine'."

⁴ See Hariz Halilovich, *Globalization and Genocide*, in *Global Public Administration, Public Policy, and Governance* (A. Faraymand ed., 2017).

⁵ Hadžimušić, Aida, "Folklorno Veličanje: Internet Preplavljen Pjesmana o Genocidu, Genocid u Srebrenici: Zločin Koji Traje," *AlJazeera Balkans*, July 11, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v9ntS8Hn1Co>.

⁶ "МИЛУНОВИЋ: ДАН РУСКИХ ДОБРОВОЉАЦА ОБИЉЕЖАВАЋЕМО СВАКЕ ГОДИНЕ, " *Новинска агенција Републике Српске* April 12, 2021, <http://89.111.245.19/novosti/891198/milunovic-dan-ruskih-dobrovoljaca-obiljezavacemo-svake-godine.htm>.

⁷ Danijel Kovacevic, "Bosnian Serbs Unveil Monument to Russian War Volunteers, " *BalkanInsight*, April 12, 2017, <https://balkaninsight.com/2017/04/12/bosnian-serbs-unveil-monument-to-russian-war-volunteers-04-12-2017/>.

⁸ Gregory Stanton, "Ten Stages of Genocide," genocidewatch.net, <http://genocidewatch.net/genocide-2/8-stages-of-genocide/>

⁹ "Delegati HDZ-a glasali protiv zakona o zabrani negiranja genocida," *Vijesti.ba*, April 12, 2021, <https://vijesti.ba/clanak/531748/delegati-hdz-a-glasali-protiv-zakona-o-zabrani-negiranja-genocida>