

The Bosnian conflict: How it began

Bosnia-Herzegovina was one of the six constituent republics in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

The multi-ethnic, multi-faith Yugoslavia was united under by Josep Broz Tito under the motto 'Brotherhood and Unity'.

After Tito's death and the fall of Communism, political parties sought to gain power through stirring up nationalism, leading to the breakup of Yugoslavia.



Before the war, there were three main ethnic groups living in Bosnia:



Bosnian Serbs
(Christian Orthodox)



Bosniaks
(Muslims)



Bosnian Croats
(Roman Catholic)

After Slovenia and Croatia declared their independence in June 1991, opinion in Bosnia was divided. Most Bosnians wished to be part of an independent, multi-ethnic country, whilst some Bosnian Serbs wanted to remain part of a Serb dominated Yugoslavia.

In a referendum held on 29 February 1992, over 99% of voters voted for an independent, multi-ethnic Bosnia

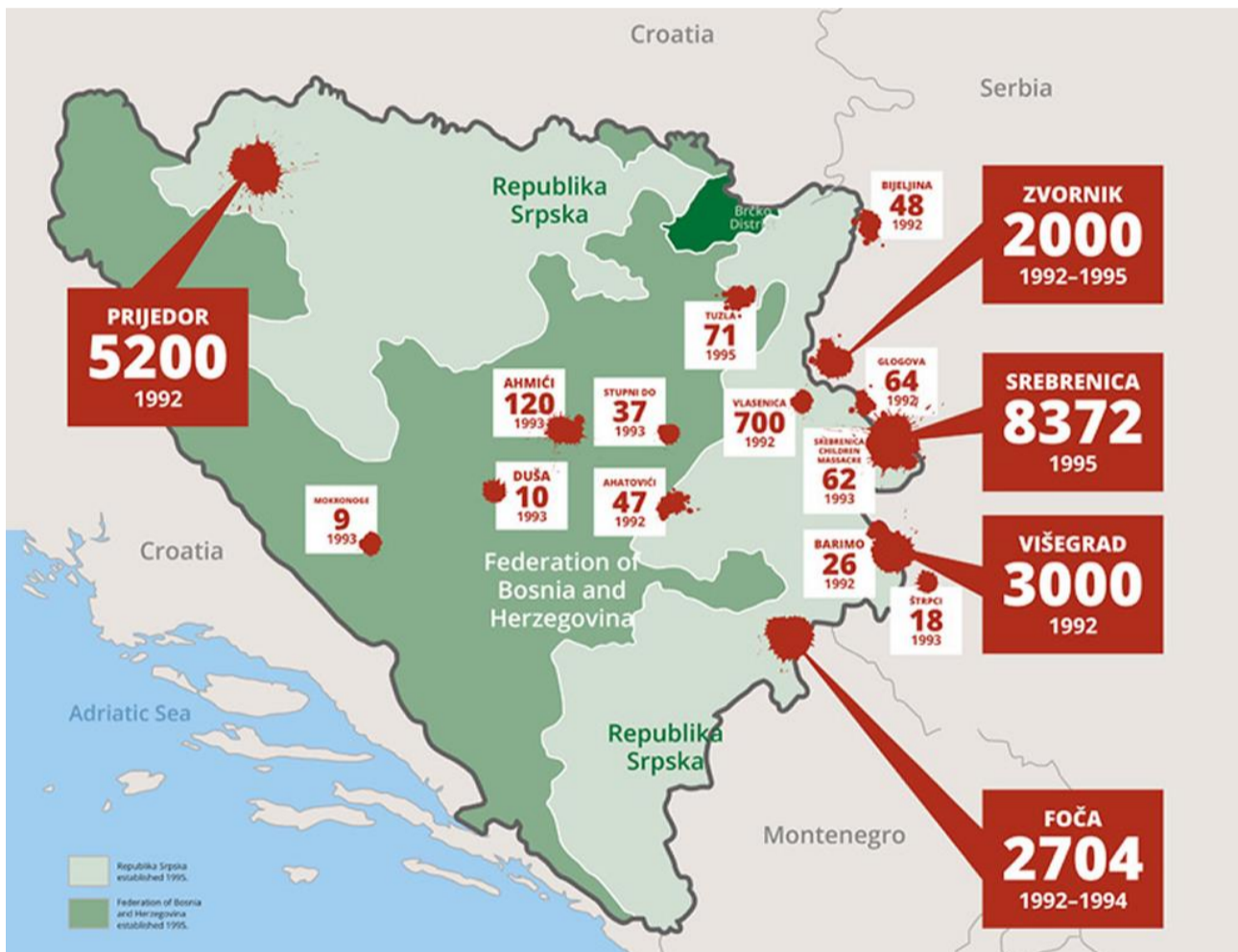
The Road to Genocide

One day after the European Community recognised the independent state of Bosnia-Herzegovina, war broke out.

Bosnian Serb politicians declared their own independent state, the 'Republika Srpska'. Their goal was to join with Serbia to become part of a "Greater Serbia" – one land for all Serb people.

In order to achieve their goal, Bosnian Serb forces forced their non-Serbs neighbours out of their homes.

They did this through a brutal campaign of persecution, concentration camps, torture, mass murder and sexual violence on an unprecedented scale – so-called "ethnic cleansing".



Over 2 million people were displaced from their homes, and mass murders began as early as 1992, as seen in the map above.

Under pressure to act, the UN designated the province of Srebrenica as a UN "Safe Zone".

Over 40,000 mostly Bosnian Muslim refugees fled to Srebrenica to seek refuge.



Photo Credit: Amel Emric

The Final Act of Genocide – Srebrenica, July 1995

On 11th July 1995, General Ratko Mladić and his Bosnian Serb forces entered the safe zone of Srebrenica.

The UN Dutch peacekeeping troops abandoned their posts and allowed the Bosnian Serb Army to enter the UN base, where 25,000 refugees had fled to seek their protection.



Photo Credit: Ron Haviv/VII/Blood and Honey

Men and women were forcibly separated. The women and girls were transported to the free territory controlled by the Bosnian Army. Many were sexually assaulted during this process.

Men and boys were taken to execution sites and brutally murdered.



Photo Credit: Damir Sagolj

However, many men and boys did not go to the UN base. Instead, they fled through the woods, trying to walk the 70km to the free territory controlled by the Bosnian Army.

However, the Bosnian Serb Army pursued the men as they fled—shelling, bombing and shooting the column of people.

Many of the fleeing men, wounded and starving, were persuaded to surrender with promises that they would be treated according to international law. Instead, they were taken to execution sites and murdered.

**Fifty years after the world said “Never Again”,
genocide happened again on European soil.**

Denial



Photo Credit: Amel Emric

After genocide came denial. Bosnian Serbs first tried to deny the genocide by digging up and reburying the victims in other locations. Bodies were damaged in this process, which has meant that remains are often found incomplete, or parts of the same person are found buried in several different mass graves.

The process of finding and identifying the victims has been challenging and painful. Over 20 years later, many survivors are still waiting to find the remains of their loved ones.

Bosnia is now divided into two political entities, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Republika Srpska.

Republika Srpska **deny** that Srebrenica was a genocide, despite the fact that two international courts (the ICJ and the ICTY) have ruled Srebrenica a genocide.

This is especially painful for the survivors of the genocide, some of whom have returned to Srebrenica.

Genocide denial also persists in Serbia. Although Serbia was not found to be directly responsible for the genocide by the ICJ, Serbian paramilitaries participated in the killings. Former Serbian President Slobodan Milošević, who was behind the “Greater Serbia” policy, was the first sitting head of state to be indicted for genocide, but he died before the verdict.



The best way to challenge denial is to speak up - to break the silence.

Survivor Stories

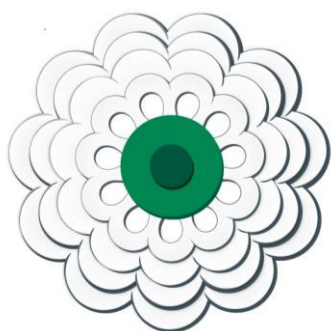
Genocide embodies very darkest aspects of human nature. We ask ourselves why. Why do people hate? Why do people rape? Why do people kill? We should also ask: How do people survive? How do people hold hope? How do people resist?

These questions are critical to the prevention of future genocides. The importance of bridging the divide and confronting hate shows how communities may resist regimes that seek to spread fear and division. They also sow the seeds of possibility for peace and reconciliation.

These are their stories.



We are calling on all communities to **REMEMBER** the victims and survivors of the Srebrenica genocide; **LEARN** the lessons from Srebrenica, particularly that we must always be vigilant against hatred and intolerance in our communities and **PLEDGE** to take action now to build better and safer communities for all.



REMEMBERING
SREBRENICA

Fadila Efendić

Fadila was taught the value of education and reading from a young age but nothing she had studied or read could have prepared her for the events which unfolded in July 1995.

Her husband, Hamed, and son, Fejzo, were murdered whilst trying to escape Srebrenica. Their fate remained unknown for years afterwards. Her drive to ensure her daughter was given the opportunity to study gave her the strength to carry on.



“They cannot put into 100 films what I saw in those two days.”

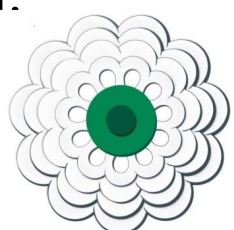
Her decision to remain in Potočari was one which would change her life forever. “You cannot explain it to someone who didn’t live through it. A war not only brings killings, many ugly things happen. As the days passed, each became more difficult than the last. I had to endure shelling; I had to endure many adversities of war.” Fadila and her daughter had to leave their home in Srebrenica, along with leaving her son and husband.

“My husband and son stayed to try and break through the woods, the next day. I never saw them again.”

Fadila and her daughter arrived at the UN base, which had turned into a scene from hell. They were there for two nights with no food or water and witnessed women dying out of fear.

Years later, her husband and sons remains were found. Her husband was found with his body found in one mass grave and his head in another. It took another 4 years to find her sons remains, with just his two leg bones being found.

Fadila has since returned to Srebrenica and has set up a business selling flowers. She tells her story so that what happened to her and Srebrenica never happens again.



REMEMBERING
SREBRENICA

Dr Ilijaz Pilav

Dr Ilijaz was one of only 5 doctors in Srebrenica at the start of the war and one of the last people to leave Srebrenica.

In the three years Srebrenica was under siege, he saved countless lives, making life or death decisions every day.



At the start of the war, he was one of only 5 doctors in Srebrenica, a town with more than 50,000 inhabitants. He was aged 28, with only two years of general practice.

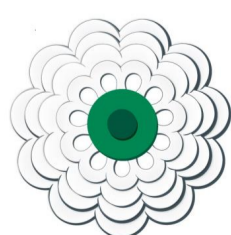
“You cannot imagine the breadth of helplessness I felt, especially in the early days.”

The conditions were horrific. “War surgery is the most difficult form of surgery and it was even worse under those abnormal conditions. We had nothing other than the utter need to help people. There are no appropriate words to describe the suffering the patient felt, or your own suffering for them at that moment.”

“I entered the hospital on the 6th July and did not leave for 5 days. I slept at most two or three hours a night.”

“There were so many injured we stopped taking records and I was constantly in surgery. Injured after injured came in. It was absolutely clear to me what was happening outside. But regardless of how clear it was, I couldn’t reconcile that this was the end. I always felt that there would be something, someone to save us, and the international community would not let us fall.”

“By telling our stories we are maybe fulfilling some part of the obligation towards those that did not survive to tell theirs. And by telling our story, we are imposing the need on someone in the future to prevent something similar happening again.”



REMEMBERING
SREBRENICA

Bakira Hasečić

President of the Women Victims of War Association in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bakira is responsible for bringing many perpetrators of wartime sexual violence to justice.

I lived in Visegrad, and we had a good life. But when the war began, Visegrad became hell. One day, my neighbour Veljko Planincic, a police officer, knocked on my door with Serb soldiers. They were heavily armed and demanding money. We were all terrified, my 16 and 19 year old daughters were at home.

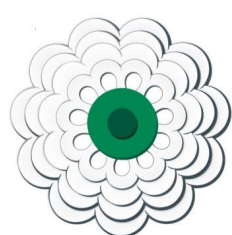


They raped our eldest daughter right in front of us, then they slashed her head open.

I thought she would die, but we carried her to the hospital and they managed to stitch her up. I sent my daughters to stay with my mother in Kosovo, but my husband and I tried to stay in our home. Several times I was taken by police or soldiers to be interrogated, and they raped me. We lived near the Drina river, and at night time I could hear the screams of people as they were being killed, and the splash as the soldiers dumped their bodies in the water.

I honestly don't know how we survived, but we did. I lost seventeen members of my family in the war.

After the war, many of us could not return home, because the people who committed these crimes were still free and working in the community, some as police officers. I founded the Women Victims of War Association, for female and male survivors of sexual violence, and we have fought to bring many perpetrators to justice. Now when I return to Visegrad, I hold my head high.



REMEMBERING
SREBRENICA

Jakob Finci

Jakob Finci was born into a Jewish Sephardic family and became a prominent figure in the Bosnian Jewish Community.

Jakob helped found and became the first Vice-President of the Jewish cultural, educational and humanitarian society, La Benevolencija.



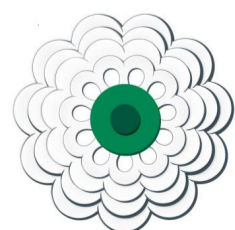
La Benevolencija acted as a relief agency for all ethnic groups in Sarajevo, refusing to take sides during the conflict and supplied much needed medical supplies to the population. Additionally, the organisation opened a soup kitchen in Sarajevo, which served 300 hot meals every day to the city, irrespective of their religious or ethnic background. In a time of such huge ethnic divisions, it was incredible to see such a lack of prejudice in the work Finci did.

“As we had always lived with the other communities, we decided to share everything with them.”

Alongside the soup kitchen, Finci set up a school for the children of Sarajevo, as a way to create some normality for children living through a siege. “One boy would ask if he could bring along his best friend, and we soon ended up with 50 ‘best friends’ from all the different communities. We taught them about living together.”

Finci assisted many Jews in leaving Sarajevo but extended his support to the other communities who needed to escape. Finci recalled helping one Muslim couple who had come to him for help. He found old documents belonging to his parents and gave them to the Muslim couple as their ticket out.

Finci went above and beyond for every community in Sarajevo. He had no question over helping those who were different from him.



REMEMBERING
SREBRENICA

Kadefa Rizvanović



Kadefa was heavily pregnant when war broke out in 1992, she had to fight to keep her family alive through 3 years of starvation and then the genocide.

When I went into labour in May 1992, everywhere in my town was blockaded and I couldn't reach a hospital. My mother-in-law and her mother-in-law had to deliver my baby at home. Just 5 days later we had to flee our town.

I begged my family to take my baby and leave me behind

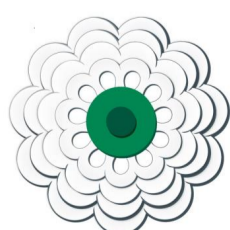
I had just given birth and I could hardly walk. But my husband said: "I will carry you, but I won't leave you". We walked for 22 days, but finally, we reached Srebrenica. There was a huge food crisis. When you're in that situation, you are just struggling to feed your children, not even thinking about yourself. We lived like that for 3 years, until Srebrenica fell in July 1995. My husband decided to go with the column of men trying to walk to the free territory.

He gave me a hug and said: "Look after the children, I have to go." I never saw him again.

My daughter was just three years old, but she walked all the way to the UN base with me. Her shoes were filled with blood from blisters, but she didn't cry, she didn't say a word.

At the UN base, we were taken on trucks to the free territory and I went to stay with my brother. Then, we started to hear some of the stories of what had happened. I was begging my brother to go and seek information about my husband: did anybody see him, what had happened to him?

It wasn't until 2003 that they found my husband's remains. I lost over 20 close relatives in the war.



REMEMBERING
SREBRENICA