

## High-level Commemorative Event “Srebrenica: Remembering and Honoring the Victims of Genocide”

July 1, 2015

The United Nations Preparatory Committee for the Commemoration of the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Srebrenica Genocide extended an invitation to its members and those associated with the United Nations Department of Public Information for Nongovernmental Organizations ([DPI/NGO](#)) to attend a special event at its headquarters in New York to remember and honor the victims of the Srebrenica massacre. This event was held in advance of the main commemoration, which was held in Potocari, Bosnia and Herzegovina, on July 11, 2015.

A Judicial Watch representative attended the commemoration in support of the victims’ survivors and to report on what advances have been made to hold the perpetrators of this mass murder accountable.\*

The host committee and many of the attendees wore a special [symbol of remembrance](#) honoring the victims of the Srebrenica genocide.



The white in the crocheted flower signifies “innocence, green signifies hope, and eleven petals stand for July 11, 1995”—the date that marks the fall of the UN-declared “safe area” in Srebrenica—and the day that marks the beginning of the worst crime that has taken place on European soil since the Second World War. Within days, over 8,000 Muslim men and young boys were systematically rounded up and slaughtered.

Many of those attending the commemoration had family members whose lives had been stolen from them at Srebrenica. The mood was somber.

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\*Judicial Watch is associated with the United Nations Department of Public Information (UN-DPI) as a nongovernmental organization, whose mission is to promote transparency, accountability and integrity in government, politics and the law. It fulfills its educational mission through litigation, investigations, and public outreach. Its International Program serves as an integral part of its educational program. Since 2001, it has been meeting with delegations from all over the world who participate in U.S. State Department-sponsored leadership programs.

The following high-level United Nations’ representatives were in attendance at the commemoration in support of those who lost husbands, sons, brothers, and fathers at Srebrenica: H.E. Ms. Mirsada Colakovic, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Bosnia and Herzegovina to the UN; H.E. Sam Kahamba Kutesa, President of the UN; H.E. Ban Ki Moon, UN Secretary-General; Ambassador Matthew Rycroft, Permanent Representative of UK to the UN; Rabbi Arthur Schneier, founder of *The Appeal of Conscience Foundation*; Serge Brammertz, Chief Prosecutor of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia; and Ambassador Samantha Power.

[Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon](#) stated:

[Srebrenica] will forever weigh on the collective conscience of the international community. We are here to remember the thousands who lost their lives in the genocide... We are here to tell the families and friends of the victims that we share their sorrow.

The Srebrenica genocide stands as one more stark reminder of the UN’s failure to protect.

Ambassador [Samantha Power](#) was a freelance reporter living in Bosnia when Srebrenica fell, and she too expressed remorse for not having foreseen the extent to which the Bosnian Serb leaders would go in their pursuit of ethnic cleansing. As she recalled:

He [Mladić] conquered a UN safe area without much of a fight; he convinced peacekeepers sheltering Bosnian civilians to turn them over to him; and, he had himself filmed passing out chocolates to young Muslim children. “Do not let any of the children get lost,” he said in television footage that gets no less chilling with the passage of time. “Don’t be afraid. Nobody will harm you.” Patting the head of a terrified young boy, he said, “you’ll be taken to a safe place.” Ratko Mladić lied.... He said that those who had done nothing wrong had nothing to fear.... But he deemed every Bosnian Muslim man or boy in Srebrenica as someone who had done something wrong – simply because they were Muslim. And he ordered the execution of each of them.

An article published by BIRN<sup>†</sup> in the [justice report](#), “Srebrenica: How to Prove a Genocide,” provides insight into the nearly two decades of painstaking investigations, ghastly and haunting discoveries, and political maneuverings witnessed by the investigators and prosecutors.

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<sup>†</sup> BIRN, the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network, is a network of local non-governmental organisations promoting freedom of speech, human rights and democratic values, <http://birn.eu.com/en/about/about-the-balkan-investigative-reporting-network> (accessed October 16, 2015).

The article detailed some of the obstacles encountered by two of the investigators for the prosecution, [Jean-Rene Ruez and Andrew Caley](#):

By the end of 1996, the search process was complete and 90 per cent of the detention and execution sites had been analysed. The first exhumations of victims’ bodies started the same year - but it soon became clear that the bodies had been moved from the place where the killings happened.... In order to solve the problem, aerial footage was requested from the US government, without which the secondary grave sites - the places to which the bodies had been moved - would never have been discovered.

Then the perpetrators began their campaign of denial. Ruez told of a meeting by then-U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, Madeleine Albright, with Ratko Mladić. When “Albright showed [Bosnian Serb military chief] Ratko Mladic the photographs of the graves, he admitted they were graves, but of Muslim soldiers, who were killed in fights and [said] they had to bury them for sanitary reasons. The problem was that when we opened the graves, we found victims with their hands tied behind their backs.”

[Caley](#) stated that the forensic evidence showed clearly that the Serb’s claim was a lie: “We had forensic evidence and the Serbs said that those were combatants, but they had their hands tied and some had blindfolds. Not all, but many.... Almost all the skulls, not all but many, had a bullet hole in the back of the head.”

The justice report also provided a final accounting by the tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, indicating that it “has so far convicted 14 people of genocide and other crimes related to Srebrenica.” Further, “former Bosnian Serb political and military chiefs Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladić are still on trial, while former Yugoslav leader Slobodan Milosevic died before his verdict.”

The Srebrenica massacre, 20 years later, stands as a stark reminder of the United Nations’ foundational limitations.