

Bosnian delegation seeks end to arms embargo, withdrawal of U.N. forces

by William Jones

The Schiller Institute hosted the first visit ever in Washington, D.C. of parliamentarians from the embattled nation of Bosnia-Herzegovina on July 17-23. The visit came at a time when the Serb genocide against the Bosnian people, which has shocked the world time and again but has been allowed to proceed with impunity, was again made manifest, with Serb forces attacking the Bosnian enclaves in the eastern part of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

With the fall of Srebrenica and the increased pressure on the town of Zepa, the brazen Serb flaunting of the U.N. "rules of engagement" has made a mockery of the western world. The atrocities reported by survivors of the attacks, in which the Serbs again went on a rampage of slaughter, separating the males for transport to an uncertain fate, and raping women and children, has increased the pressure on the governments of the West, and particularly on the United States, to act to stop the butchery. The public outrage is particularly great as the areas attacked, overrun, and "ethnically cleansed" had been declared "safe havens" by the United Nations. The Serb aggression has made apparent to even the most obstinate skeptics, the total bankruptcy of the United Nations.

Speaking before television cameras at a press conference at the National Press Club on July 19, the two parliamentarians, Mr. Safet Hidic and Mrs. Razema Mehadzic-Cero, called on the United States to lift the arms embargo and allow the Bosnians to defend themselves against the Serb aggressors.

Mehadzic-Cero, a representative from Banja Luka, an area of Bosnia-Herzegovina now under Serb occupation, blasted the role of the U.N. forces. "Three years ago, the U.N. was supposed to protect the Bosnians. And how did they do that? After three years, there is more killing than ever. After three years, our people and children are starving. And after three years, U.N. forces have still to set foot on any Serb territory," she said.

The story of Bihac

When the U.N. tried to surrender Bihac into Serb hands, the Bosnian Army would not let them do it, she explained. The Bosnians produced their own weapons in the area and they used them to defend themselves. Bihac is today still a safe haven—but no thanks to the U.N. The town of Srebrenica, which previously had been defended by Bosnian forces,

fell when the U.N. Protection Forces (Unprofor) troops had taken over a part of the defense perimeter, and the Serbs could break through, she explained. "And from news I learned just today," Mehadzic-Cero said, "some of these Serbs came in wearing blue helmets which they had gotten from Unprofor troops."

Hidic, who represents a district in the Bihac area, had been the second-in-command of the Bosnian military forces that had defended Bihac. He stressed that the Bosnians didn't want U.S. troops in Bosnia. "We have soldiers. We don't need more help," he said. "They should leave Bosnia-Herzegovina. Until now they have done nothing. Unprofor has become simply a tourist organization with employees pocketing high salaries. . . . Mr. [U.N. Secretary General Boutros] Boutros-Ghali, [U.N. Special Envoy Yasushi] Akashi, [U.N. negotiator Thorvald] Stoltenburg, should all be taken to the Hague to stand trial for war crimes. . . . Now they have created this Rapid Reaction Force. If they were really rapid, they would have come to Srebrenica to defend the people there."

Disappointment in the United States

The parliamentarians also expressed great bitterness over the failure of the West to act, their disappointment being greatest perhaps with the United States, in which they had placed their greatest hopes. "When the Contact Group proposals were generated [with the proposed territorial division of Bosnia-Herzegovina] they were not to our liking, but we signed the resolutions," Hidic said. "When the resolution on safe havens was produced, we signed that, too." The fall of "safe haven" Srebrenica was the ultimate disappointment over the agreements that they had gone along with, Hidic explained. "Srebrenica is a great wound."

"We have done everything the U.S. has asked of us," Mehadzic-Cero said. "Our faith in the U.S. was unwavering. We now ask the help of the United States."

They also spoke of the atrocities that have been perpetrated again and again with impunity ever since the beginning of the Serb aggression—the "ethnic cleansing," the rapes, the torture, and the murders. "The first day the Serbs came into Srebrenica," Hidic said, "400 people were slaughtered." Hidic described one incident where the Serbs had rounded up little girls 11 to 14 years of age. "They then took the little



Two parliamentarians from Bosnia-Herzegovina, Mrs. Rasema Mehadzic-Cero (left) and Mr. Safet Hidic (right, at podium) speak in Washington, D.C. following the fall of the U.N. "safe haven" in Srebrenica.

girls into a room full of bearded, dirty Serb Chetniks. The girls were raped all night while the parents were forced to stand outside the door and listen. The girls came out the next morning and the Chetniks raped the mothers while the children were forced to watch."

Mehadzic-Cero said that there were reports from Tuzla that there were over 500 bodies piled up in Srebrenica after the Serbs were finished, people they had simply butchered.

"We are a civilized, dedicated people," Mehadzic-Cero said. "We are an industrious people, devoted to family life. You can't kill our will to survive. We will survive or we will all perish. There is no middle ground."

Air-drops must be resumed

Hidic urged the United States to resume air-drops in the Bihac area in order to provide food and supplies to the population there. "The air-drops have been virtually suspended," Hidic said. Although the air-drops to Bihac had been part of the agreement constituting it as a "safe haven," the drops have been discontinued for over a year.

Hidic also stressed the urgency for the United States to bomb the Serb artillery positions outside the safe havens. "The embargo against the Serbs must also be strengthened, as well as the borders between Bosnia-Herzegovina and Yugoslavia," he said. Hidic explained how the heavy weapons had been handed over by the Bosnians and the Croats to the care of Unprofor in accordance with the U.N. "ground rules." These same weapons were then taken by force by the Serbs, who had no interest in playing by the "rules."

A message was also sent by a third parliamentarian, Vlado Pandzic, a Bosnian Croat, who because of previous obli-

gations was unable to be a part of the delegation. "Until now the international community was permanently denying the right of the Bosnian and Croatian people to defend themselves against Serbian aggression," the Pandzic message read. "Giving an opportunity for committing crimes against Croatian and Bosnian people at the end of the 20th century is an unforgettable crime against the human race. We are all witnesses of the political failure of the United Nations."

Zepa and Gorazde

The parliamentarians were asked several questions at the press conference. A former U.S. congressman asked about the reaction in Congress to their visit. Another question was raised about the situation in Zepa and Gorazde, two other safe havens now under Serb attack.

"The Serb Chetniks have had the project of retaking these cities on their plate for some time," Hidic said. "Zepa has been under siege for quite some time. The heavy weapons were taken away from the Bosnians and the Croats by Unprofor, and the Serbs took these weapons from Unprofor." Hidic said that "the Serbs are cowards. They only fight from the mountains with their heavy artillery, killing women and children. The U.S. must bomb the artillery placements around Gorazde and Zepa while the arms embargo is being lifted."

In response to a question about the reaction of the religious leadership to the atrocities occurring in Bosnia, Mehadzic-Cero said, "Both the Catholics and the Muslims have condemned the genocide. Only the Serbian Orthodox Church is supporting it. The ecumenical mandate of the Serbian Orthodox should be taken away from them."