



Lemkin Institute Statement on the Threat of Renewed Genocide in Bosnia and Herzegovina

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The Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention condemns the genocidal rhetoric of Serbian politicians in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) that threatens the stability of the country almost twenty five years after the end of the Bosnian War. The ongoing rhetoric violates the *General Framework Agreement for Peace* (GFAP) signed in 1995, and has caused an unprecedented political crisis in the country. Christian Schmidt, the UN High Representative in BiH, wrote in his first report in October 2021 that the country "faces the greatest existential threat of the postwar period."

As BiH faces upcoming elections, the Lemkin Institute wishes to call attention to the threat of a renewed genocide against Bosniaks (Bosnian Muslims) by Serbs. It is imperative that world leaders speak out clearly against genocidal denial and support the security of Bosniaks with increased diplomatic pressure and demands for accountability.

Since the end of the Bosnian War and genocide, which killed more than 100,000 people, BiH has been divided into two administrative units by the Dayton Peace Agreement (1995): the Serb-majority Republika Srpska (RS) and the Bosniak-Croat Federation.

In 2021, authorities from RS sought to unilaterally and illegally seize powers and jurisdiction normally conferred to the central state by the GFAP, threatening the integrity of the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Serb member of the BiH Presidency, Milorad Dodik, represents the greatest threat in this regard. In January 2022 the U.S. Department of the Treasury recently sanctioned him because of his "destabilizing corrupt activities and attempts to dismantle the Dayton Peace Accords." More recently, the UK Parliament also imposed sanctions on Dodik and on Zeljka Cvijanovic (President of the entity of Republika Srpska) for their "attempts to undermine the legitimacy and functionality of the State" and wrote that "the pair are deliberately undermining the hard-won peace" in the country. The Lemkin Institute welcomes these sanctions as a deterrent to politicians with destructive agendas.

In this poisoned atmosphere, the Orthodox holidays in January 2022 led to grave ethnically-motivated hate speech and hate crimes directed against Bosniaks. Injuries and threats against Bosniaks were reported in all the major towns in RS and in the Brčko District. Gunshots were fired in the immediate vicinity of mosques, officials publicly glorified the Srebrenica genocide, singing songs in honor of Ratko Mladić, and Bosnian Serbs repeatedly used ethnic insults against Bosniaks.

On the same holiday, Dodik even stood publicly alongside the convicted war criminal Vinko Pandurević (sentenced to 13 years of imprisonment for violations of the laws or customs of war and crimes against humanity). This led to a worldwide outcry from the Bosnian diaspora, who urged the international community to sanction these events. The Lemkin Institute firmly condemns these destructive behaviors, which create a climate of mistrust and fear within the population.

Moreover, Serbian nationalist leaders continue to propagate a revisionist discourse of the war despite broad international consensus and numerous international and domestic court judgments. In July 2021, the Republika Srpska administration attempted to renew baseless doubts by financing and issuing a new report denying even further the overwhelming evidence of the Srebrenica genocide.

In his last report from May 2022, Christian Schmidt expressed his utmost concern with regard to the “grave violation of the GFAP” orchestrated by Bosnian politicians which has resulted in a “continuously escalating political crisis.” The upcoming elections in October 2022 will be decisive for the future of the country. Already candidates have heightened tensions between the ethnic groups with exclusivist nationalist rhetoric that harkens back to the days before the outbreak of war and genocide in 1992.

Schmidt’s report also condemned the growing rhetoric of genocide denial along with “relativization of war crimes and glorification of war criminals.” In RS and the neighboring country of Serbia, new posters and graffiti representing war criminals, such as General Ratko Mladić, were glued to and drawn on walls in cities. The Lemkin Institute deplores this genocidal ideological culture directed against the Muslim population of BiH. We are particularly concerned that genocidal ideology is once again growing in strength even 27 years after the Srebrenica Genocide, during which more than 8,000 Muslim men and boys were massacred by the Army of Republika Srpska.

The Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention calls on the international community to act immediately in order to preserve the peace in BiH. The war in BiH showed that a slow response can cost the lives of tens of thousands of people. Intensive genocide prevention work in BiH is absolutely crucial given the events of the past year to avoid repeating the tragic mistakes of the 1990s. Officials in RS and in Serbia must be brought to understand that any actions that threaten a repeat of the events of the Bosnian War will be met with a swift and punishing response from the international community.