

Indeed, ongoing genocide denial trends constitute an affront not only to the verdicts issued by courts of justice but also to victims and survivors, who— with them— are being victimized again. Questioning the tragic reality of the genocide that happened in Srebrenica— or for that matter, of in Rwanda in 1994, or in the Holocaust, or in Cambodia is not acceptable and will never be acceptable. Not when Courts of Law have determined conclusively that this crime, the crime of genocide, happened. Amplifying the spread of messages denying that genocide— the deliberate killing of Bosnian Muslim men and boys, because of who they were— took place, including with hate speech and with glorification of war criminals, is equally vicious.

For far too long survivors have been the primary voices raising alarm on genocide denial and having to testify, over and over again, that their experiences were real. In this, as in many other aspects of their work, they should never be alone. Genocide denial robs them of their lived reality.

It is only by addressing the legacy of the past, by promoting its understanding through truth seeking and accountability, and by dealing with the root causes and the continuing impact of such violence on society, that sustainable peace can be achieved. The voices of those who acknowledge the crimes committed in the past and the suffering they caused must be stronger than those of people who deny them.

I am privileged to have met such brave voices in my two visits to Bosnia and Herzegovina, the one I have already referred to in 2021, and a second visit one year later, in 2022. In that country, I have met many people who are promoting peace and encouraging trust building, healing and reconciliation. Many such initiatives are led by the generations that experienced the conflict and who know the terrible impact that it has on society. Many are also led by the younger generations, across the region, who want a future free from division and violence and from the hatred that fuels it, including through hate speech. They want to build a world in which empathy and understanding prevail over difference and hatred. They know that what brings people together is much stronger than what could drive them apart. Or, as the organization ‘Mountains without Prejudice’, which gathers together hikers from different ethnic groups in the country, and whom I met in the town of Bosanski Petrovac told me, ‘the hardest mountain we had to climb was the mountain of prejudice, real mountains after that one were easy to climb.’ This organization, small in number but yet enormous in hope and aspirations for the future, remains united in preserving the nature of their home region and promoting its beauty— its richness of diversity, from nature and people alike.

Initiatives such as this one continue growing despite the challenges that come with the fragmentation that permeates so many dimensions of this country. There is perhaps no more vivid example of this than the education system. Education in Bosnia Herzegovina segregates children, instills division, increases mistrust, impedes reconciliation and constitutes a long term threat to stability and security. It essentially perpetuates the notion that there are inherent differences between children. This is not only true in respect to the about 4% to 6% of schools in the country which are divided on the principle of “two schools under one roof”. Under this principle, two separate schooling systems are housed, from two ethnic communities, under one physical building. It is particularly concerning with the remaining 94% to 98% of schools which are predominantly mono ethnic. This means that, in such schools, there are no ‘others’ which are

could meet, know, learn and play with. The segregated school system in the country provides no notion of shared history, geography and language. Promoting more inclusive schools remains essential for trust building and reconciliation in the country.

Education is also essential for the prevention of future genocides. In my visits, I was proud to meet two school Principals that understood this better than anyone, in the beautiful yet divided city of Stolac. These two school principals, working in the same physical building but managing two separate schools within it, as required under the 'two schools under one roof' system, recognized that, if they could not change the system, they could create additional space in it for all the children at their schools to interact, in spite of their ethnic identity. With this aim, they decided to set up a library. Small and humble, against a sardine can set of challenges, yet cozy, and full of children whose identity became universal within the walls of their joint library, in the only place the ethnic communities meet, though their children I will never forget their smiles when they ran towards me to ask questions and to show me their books.

It is surreal, I think to myself, that my nieces of the same age can learn about the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and of the Srebrenica genocide, in their schools in Kenya, but the children in different places across Bosnia and Herzegovina cannot do precisely that.

This is particularly tragic because education about past genocides, war crimes and crimes against humanity is essential for the prevention of such crimes and it is essential for moving forward. The need is in societies that have experienced genocide. This requires sustained investment and provision of formal and non-formal education. The archives and other records and verdicts of the tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, and all the work done subsequently, including by civil society, to document the past and support truth telling, provide an important take-off point for such an endeavor.

Societies that do not fully acknowledge and address past genocides and their devastating impact on individuals, families and societies continue to face the risk of such crimes recurring.

The task of acknowledging all suffering, of bringing people together and of building a future free from the crimes committed in the past, requires concerted and sustained efforts both by those in positions of leadership as well as by all citizens within their respective communities and spaces, many of whom I met in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

With their efforts, day after day, the flowers of Srebrenica and the roses from Srebrenica will continue growing in fields where the memory of innocent civilians nourishes the hopes of those who will never forget them and of 1 _____ are subse