

**30 years Commemoration of Genocide in Srebrenica
826 George Street, Haymarket, NSW 2000, 26 July 2025
SPEAKING NOTES – PROF. SEV OZDOWSKI AM**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Master of Ceremonies: Ms Nihada Alemic

Thank you for the Welcome to Country.

It is my pleasure to acknowledge distinguished guests:

- H.E. Kemal Muftic, Ambassador of Bosnia and Herzegovina to Australia and New Zealand
- The Hon. Ed Husic MP, representing the Federal Government
- Mr Safet Alispahic, President, Bosnian Community Council of NSW
- Mr Greg Stone, Universal Peace Federation Oceania
- Respected Iman Muhamed Kan and other religious leaders
- All distinguished speakers, members of the Bosnian community, survivors of this terrible war, ladies and gentlemen, all

INTRODUCTION

Thank you for inviting me to address this important commemoration.

This year marks the 30th anniversary of the Srebrenica genocide, in which over 8,000 Muslim men and boys were murdered, in the worst atrocity on European soil since the Second World War.

They were murdered because of their religious identity. They were murdered in a town, once considered a melting pot of cultures, in which Muslims, Christians, Jews and others lived side by side in peace.

Today we remember those who were killed and we honour their loved ones who survived.

We stand with them in their ongoing quest for justice.

I accepted the invitation not only because of my sorrow for the victims of Srebrenica and my personal commitment to human rights.

I have accepted it, also, because I was born in Poland shortly after the end of WW II, and I understand the tragedy of the Bosnian people. As you know, my country of birth has witnessed many genocidal events throughout its history.

During WW II in German-occupied Poland, we witnessed the Jewish holocaust, and the Nazi constructed concentration camps, or more correctly, industrialised slaughterhouses for humans.

And today, some deny that the holocaust ever happened. That gas chambers ever existed in Auschwitz.

Poles also remember that during World War II, the Soviet NKVD murdered 23,000 Polish military and intelligentsia prisoners of war in the Katyn forest.

Some contemporary Russian leaders still refuse to acknowledge the Katyn massacre.

I still remember my family members and friends, waiting for their loved ones to return home, long after the war had finished, making frantic inquiries with the Red Cross to find their relatives, or simply trying to establish where their graves were located.

WHAT HAS HAPPENED IN SREBRENICA?

There is no doubt about what happened in Srebrenica thirty years ago. The Srebrenica genocide is well documented.

In July 1995, over 8,000 Bosniak men and teenage boys from the region were massacred by the nationalist Bosnian Serb forces under the command of General Ratko Mladic, a convicted war criminal.

Bosniak men (some as young as 15 years old) were separated from women and the elderly, stripped of their personal belongings. Then they were deliberately and methodically killed because of their Muslim identity.

Three years ago I visited the "Srebrenica-Potočari Genocide Memorial and Cemetery". In the middle of the Cemetery, there is a memorial wall, on which the names of the 8,372 victims are engraved. I still remember the forest of white columns honouring the victims.

What is particularly difficult to understand is that all this "ethnic cleansing" happened with UN forces nearby; first disarming the local Muslims and offering them a "safe area", and then withdrawing and leaving Bosniaks to their fate.

But, despite the existence of undeniable facts, some Bosnian Serb leaders still continue to deny that a genocide had taken place there.

IN BREACH OF INTERNATIONAL HR LAWS.

The events in Srebrenica 30 years ago represent the most serious violations of international humanitarian and human rights law.

They represent a breach of the United Nations Charter adopted 80 years ago. Article 1 of the 1945 UN Charter defines promotion of human rights as one of the UN objectives.

The Srebrenica genocide also represents a breach of many international laws established to protect human rights, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the *UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide*, adopted in 1948.

The Convention defined genocide as a crime, usually committed by a government or an arm of it, with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial, linguistic or religious group, the majority views that as sub-human.

The Convention also established that people committing genocide, or inciting it, or conspiring to commit it, or complicit in genocide should be punished.

This means that the international community of nations has clearly established that:

genocide is a crime against humanity, and that

any person associated with it should be severely punished.

Further, it needs to be noted that in April 1993, the world leaders adopted the UN Security Council Resolution 819, which assured Bosniaks that Srebrenica would be treated as "*a safe area which*

should be free from any armed attacks” and demanded that the Republika Srpska Army withdraw from the areas surrounding Srebrenica.

Regrettably, despite all the international law, UN resolutions and assurances, the genocide took place in Srebrenica.

Thus, the contemporary UN system of protection has failed the victims of genocide in Srebrenica.

It is especially disappointing that UN officials did not learn from earlier experiences. In particular, the earlier Rwandan genocide is another example where confusion and lack of effective action characterised the United Nations system.

WHAT WAS DONE AFTER THE MASSACRE?

After the Srebrenica massacre, several measures were taken by the international community.

The International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, as well as the International Court of Justice, unanimously ruled that it was an act of genocide.

General Ratko Mladic, who commanded the forces, was convicted of genocide by a U.N. war crimes tribunal in The Hague, along with Serb political leader Radovan Karadzic.

But the creation of laws, legal institutions and prosecution of perpetrators of genocide are not enough to deliver justice to victims and prevent occurrences of genocide in the future.

WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE?

FIRST, we need to ensure that victims of the Srebrenica genocide are remembered.

However, today’s commemoration cannot be only an event of sorrow and remembrance. It also needs to be an essential occasion for educating others that acts of genocide begin with targeting and dehumanising groups of people.

We need to stand together against hatred, discrimination, and prejudice here in Australia, and work for safer, stronger, and more cohesive communities. We need to build bridges to reconciliation; there is no place for those who deny genocide, attempt to rewrite history, and glorify war criminals.

By remembering the pain of the past, we can collectively work to ensure that these horrific tragedies never happen again.

Therefore, I welcome the UN General Assembly’s decision of May 2024 to nominate 11 July as the Annual Day of Reflection and Commemoration of the Genocide in Srebrenica.

Therefore, I congratulate you - the Bosnia Herzegovina community - on holding the commemoration each year on the anniversary of this massacre.

These commemorations are a significant event not only for the Bosnian community but for all Australians as today’s Australia is a multicultural society built on respect for many cultures and religions.

Thus, we should use the Srebrenica Memorial Day to both:

- Commemorate the victims of genocide in Srebrenica; and
- commit ourselves to creating a more cohesive, stronger and safer society in Australia, free from hatred, discrimination and prejudice.

Let us all take personal responsibility for treating our fellow humans with dignity and respect.

This will build a world free of prejudice and hate toward people who have different religions or ethnicities from us.

Lest we forget Srebrenica!

Thank you.