



THE 1995 GENOCIDE IN SREBRENICA

Thirty-One Years of Combating Genocide Denial

The week of 11 July 2026 marked 31 years since Bosnian Serb forces systematically killed more than 8,000 Bosnian Muslim (Bosniak) men and boys in Srebrenica, Bosnia & Herzegovina and surrounding areas. To this day, their remains are still being uncovered and loved ones are still grieving. While much has changed over these 31 years, the memories and the mourning remain, and survivors continue combating genocide denial.

Historical Context

The death of Yugoslav president Josip Broz Tito in 1980 was a major turning point in the history of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY). Seen as a unifying leader, his death was followed by an upheaval of ethnic nationalism throughout the six

republics that made up the SFRY, and later the fall of socialism in Eastern Europe. These drastic changes contributed to the independence of the individual republics. Bosnia gained independence in 1992, with half of the country divided into what is now Republika Srpska (RS), the Bosnian Serb dominated region. Slobodan Milošević, president of the Republic of Serbia, was determined to “ethnically cleanse” the Bosniaks out of Bosnian Serb territory in order to create an ethnically and religiously united state.¹

This triggered the onset of the Bosnian War in 1992, which commenced the three years of violence and ethnic conflict that finally ended in December of 1995 with the signing of the *Dayton Peace Agreement*.

The Genocide

On April 16, 1993, Potočari, a village in the Srebrenica municipality, was declared a United Nations (UN) safe area by the *UN Security Council Resolution 819* due to rising tensions between Bosnian Serb forces and the Bosniak citizens, prompting the arrival of Canadian peacekeeping forces. A year later, the Canadians were replaced by Dutch peacekeeping forces who remained until the genocide.² After the outnumbered Dutch Battalion’s request for NATO air strikes on Bosnian Serb forces was delayed, the safe zone fell to the Bosnian Serb forces on 11 July 1995. Thousands of Bosniaks fled Srebrenica, hoping to find safety in areas controlled by the Bosnian government. However, the forces of General



Map showing the changing borders of the Western Balkans between 1945 and 2026.

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United Nations base in Potočari where Dutch Battalion (*Dutchbat*) peacekeeping troops were stationed.

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Ratko Mladić, leader of the Army of Republika Srpska (VRS), destroyed this hope of refuge by ambushing, attacking, and disguising as UN peacekeepers along these routes to freedom.³

This was the beginning of the systematic killing of an estimated 8,372 Bosniak men and boys and forcible displacement of Bosniak women. The exact number is still unknown as remains continue to be found and identified to this day.



General Ratko Mladić (centre) arrives for UN-mediated talks at Sarajevo airport, June 1993.
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Confronting Denial

In April 2004, the Appeals Chamber of the *International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia* (ICTY) declared the events of July 1995 a genocide in *Prosecutor v. Radislav Krstić*⁴, upholding this judgement made in the Trial Chamber in August 2001. This concurred with the judgement made by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in July 1996 in the *Bosnia and Herzegovina v. Serbia and Montenegro* case⁵.

These two landmark judgements by the ICTY and ICJ conclusively held that the events in Srebrenica were to be legally defined as genocide.

law that would ban genocide denial and the glorification of war crimes and their perpetrators.⁸ This outraged many politicians and citizens of RS, especially its president Milorad Dodik. Alongside other RS officials, Dodik declared the beginning of RS secession from Bosnia, causing RS to pull out of state programmes including healthcare and tax administration.⁹ While RS was reimplemented in these programmes in 2022, they continue to fight against this law.

The most impactful way that genocide denial has been confronted over the last thirty years has been through education

located in the former UN safe zone in Potočari, has hosted a week-long Srebrenica Youth School to educate youth aged 18-30 through a variety of speakers, workshops, tours, and immersive experiences about the Genocide in Srebrenica and others, such as the Holocaust and the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda. Through these mechanisms, young adults from around the world have had the opportunity to learn the truth from firsthand accounts about the importance of memorialising sites of genocide.

Day of Commemoration

On 23 May 2024, the UN General Assembly voted for *Resolution 78/282, International Day of Reflection and Commemoration of the 1995 Genocide in Srebrenica*¹⁰ to be adopted. This UN resolution declares 11 July as the *International Day of Reflection and Commemoration of the 1995 Genocide in Srebrenica*. It condemns any form of denial of the genocide and emphasises the importance of continuing the search and identification of victims in order to provide proper burials. It has

“The Trial Chamber is also convinced beyond any reasonable doubt that a crime of genocide was committed in Srebrenica.”⁶

Despite the rulings of the ICTY, denial of these atrocities being defined as a genocide continue to be extremely prevalent in Serbia, Republika Srpska (RS), and amid their political supporters. In order to confront these falsifications, in July 2021, the High Representative to Bosnia & Herzegovina⁷ facilitated the development of a

and documentation by survivors. Survivor-focused organisations such as the Srebrenica Memorial Centre and Mothers of Srebrenica continue to educate the world using survivor testimonies and artifacts to advocate for justice, accountability, memorialisation, and peacebuilding. Since 2020, the Srebrenica Memorial Center,



Wall of names at the Potočari Genocide Memorial near Srebrenica, Bosnia & Herzegovina
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Coffins Prepared for Reburial at the Srebrenica Memorial Ceremony in Potočari, Bosnia & Herzegovina, July 2007.
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since been utilised in combating the denial of the genocide by creating a bulwark to be supported by the international community.

In April 2024, the National Assembly of Republika Srpska published a report, “Report of the Independent International Commission for the Investigation of the Suffering of All Peoples in the Srebrenica Region in the Period from 1992 to 1995,” denying that the Genocide in Srebrenica could be classified as a genocide, further adding fuel to ongoing protests over the UN General Assembly resolution that was voted on the following month.

Additionally, Dodik organised a rally in protest of the resolution, claiming that while a crime was committed, he did not believe that it amounted to genocide. He stated that if the resolution was approved, Republika Srpska would secede from the rest of Bosnia.¹¹ While this has yet to occur, tensions between the differing view-

points remain high throughout the country.

Legacy

While the work of politicians and UN officials is a step in the right direction of supporting the fight against those who deny the Genocide in Srebrenica, no resolution can bring back the loved ones who were murdered. It is imperative that survivors, journalists, academics, and the rest of the global community prioritise the education of the events of July 1995 in order to create a shared goal to build peace and understanding to prevent further atrocities in the region. By denying genocide, society is enabling history to repeat itself.

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ENDNOTES

1. “Genocide in Bosnia”, Holocaust Museum Houston, retrievable at: <https://hnh.org/library/research/genocide-in-bosnia-guide/> (last accessed on 3 February 2026).
2. “The Srebrenica ‘safe area’”, Srebrenica Memorial Center, retrievable at: <https://srebrenicamemorial.org/en/page/the-srebrenica-safe-area/25> (last accessed on 3 February 2026).
3. “The Srebrenica genocide in the context of the war of aggression”, Remembering Srebrenica, retrievable at: <https://srebrenica.org.uk/what-happened/history/introduction-srebrenica> (last accessed on 3 February 2026).
4. *Prosecutor v. Radislav Krstić* International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (Appeals Chamber), Judgment, Case Number IT-98-33-A, 19 April 2004.
5. *Case concerning Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Bosnia and Herzegovina v. Yugoslavia)* International Court of Justice (Judgment) 11 July 1996.
6. “Radislav Krstić becomes the First Person to be Convicted of Genocide at the ICTY and Sentenced to 46 Years’ Imprisonment”, Press Release, International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (2 August 2001), retrievable at: <https://www.icty.org/en/press/radislav-krstic-becomes-first-person-be-convicted-genocide-icty-and-sentenced-46-years> (last accessed on 13 July 2026).
7. The High Representative was a position created by the international bodies of the Dayton Peace Agreement to oversee the civilian implementation of the agreement both in Bosnia & Herzegovina and internationally. Christian Schmidt of Germany currently holds this position. See more at <https://www.ohr.int/about-ohr/general-information/>.
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10. “International Day of Reflection and Commemoration of the 1995 Genocide in Srebrenica”, United Nations General Assembly Resolution 78/282, 30 May 2024 (A/RES/78/282), retrievable at: <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n24/152/96/pdf/n2415296.pdf> (last accessed on 3 February 2026).
11. “Thousands of Bosnian Serbs attend rally denying genocide was committed in Srebrenica in 1995”, AP News, retrievable at: <https://apnews.com/article/bosnia-serbs-srebrenica-genocide-denial-56d4c3b1e7dca96a5be28b66a9fcdc6a> (last accessed on 3 February 2026).