
BOSNIA MARKS 21ST ANNIVERSARY OF SREBRENICA GENOCIDE

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12.07.2016

11.07.2016

Anadolu Agency

Thousands of people gathered at a memorial center in Bosnia on Monday to mark the 21st anniversary of the 1995 Srebrenica genocide.

A memorial center in Potocari village – just northwest of Srebrenica town – was the focal point of remembrance for a large number of friends and relatives of the estimated 8,000 victims.

Coffins containing the newly identified remains of 127 victims had been taken to the site on Sunday before a collective funeral.

Tears and silence accompanied the scene as the green coffins were lined up side-by-side.

The youngest victim among the 127 dead had been identified as Avdiya (Emin) Memic who was 14 when he was killed. Memic was buried with his uncle Abdulrahman and his young cousin Halil, who was 16 when he died.

About 8,000 Bosnian Muslim men and boys were killed after the Bosnian Serb army attacked the UN "safe area" of Srebrenica in July 1995, despite the presence of Dutch troops tasked with acting as international peacekeepers.

So far 6,504 victims have been buried at the Potocari Memorial Centre. At last year's commemoration, 136 Srebrenica victims were interred at the site.

Speaking at the ceremony, Chairman of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina Bakir Izetbegovic stressed the importance of justice for reconciliation:

"Justice must be achieved, because without it there is no reconciliation and prerequisites for forgiveness and confidence-building.

"Are we on the way to achieving this justice? Are we on the way to achieving justice for the victims and their families in Bosnia and Herzegovina?

Their souls will not rest and the eyes of the victims will only close when you realize justice, or will not close ever," Izetbegovic said.

Every year, the remains of more than a hundred victims are identified and buried in Potocari on the anniversary of the genocide.

However, hundreds of Bosniak families are still searching for missing people as a large number of victims were thrown into mass graves around the country during the 1992-1995 Bosnian War.

A total of 8,400 people remain missing since the wars end, according to the Institute for Missing Persons in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

-Turkey has never forgotten Srebrenica

Also attending Mondays ceremony was Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu who said Ankara had never forgotten Srebrenica:

"I speak on behalf of my nation and condemn those who polluted innocence and buried [victims] in mass graves.

I offer my most sincere condolences to the families of our martyrs. We believe that Srebrenica *where the dignity of humanity wandered will also be the place where human dignity will flourish and shine like srebr, like silver.

"Every conflict that was going on in the Balkans was also the pain that we [Turks] feel in our hearts because if Bosnia is not quiet, Turkey cannot sleep peacefully while Bosnia is crying," Cavusoglu added.

Cavusoglu also said that Turkey would always back Bosnia and the Balkans to achieve stability, peace and prosperity.

During his speech at the ceremony, the foreign minister also conveyed greetings from President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Prime Minister Binali Yildirim.

As part of the anniversary, thousands of people from all over the world attended an annual peace march. The walk began three days ago in Nežak town near the Bosnian city of Tuzla and concluded at the cemetery in Potocari on Monday.

Since 2005, thousands of people have attended the Mars Mira (Peace March) which follows the same forest path that was used by Bosniak men and boys fleeing the Srebrenica genocide. The path from Srebrenica to Tuzla is commonly known as Death Way.

- War crimes -

Since last years Srebrenica anniversary, former Army of Republika Srpska general Zdravko Tolimir died on Feb. 9 at the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY).

Tolimir, 67, had been sentenced to life in prison for his role in the 1995 killings.

Ex-Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic, 70, was jailed for 40 years on charges of genocide and crimes against humanity during the Bosnian War which left tens of thousands of people dead.

A week after Karadzic's verdict, the same UN tribunal acquitted Serbian Radical Party leader Vojislav Seselj of three counts of crimes against humanity and six counts of violations of the laws or customs of war.

A few weeks before Mondays 21st anniversary, recognizing the killings in Srebrenica as genocide had dominated Serbia's domestic agenda.

At the urging of some NGOs, a group of 11 Serbian lawmakers called for the National Assembly to adopt a resolution recognizing the genocide of Bosniak Muslims during the conflict in the former Yugoslavia.

However, a fresh dispute between Serbia and Bosnia has broken out after Serbian Prime Minister Aleksandar Vucic said he would not attend the commemoration ceremony in Srebrenica this year after the towns mayor, Camil Durakovic, said those who would not accept the deaths as genocide were not welcome.

Vucic was forced to flee last years ceremony after his party was attacked with stones and sticks.

By Talha Ozturk

BELGRADE, Serbia

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