

CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH

4TH DISTRICT, NEW JERSEY

CONSTITUENT SERVICE CENTERS:

MONMOUTH
112 Village Center Drive
Freehold, NJ 07728-2510
(732) 780-3035

OCEAN
405 Route 539
Plumsted, NJ 08514-2303
(609) 286-2571; (732) 350-2300

MERCER
4573 South Broad Street
Hamilton, NJ 08620-2215
(609) 585-7878

2373 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-3004
(202) 225-3765

<http://chrissmith.house.gov>



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

SENIOR MEMBER, FOREIGN AFFAIRS
COMMITTEE

CHAIRMAN, AFRICA, GLOBAL HEALTH,
GLOBAL HUMAN RIGHTS, AND
INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS
SUBCOMMITTEE

WESTERN HEMISPHERE
SUBCOMMITTEE

CO-CHAIRMAN, COMMISSION ON SECURITY
AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

CO-CHAIRMAN, CONGRESSIONAL-EXECUTIVE
COMMISSION ON CHINA

DEAN, NEW JERSEY DELEGATION

Remembering and Reflecting on the Srebrenica genocide

*Urging Passage of H. Res. 310
Expressing the Sense of the House on Srebrenica
U.S. Rep. Chris Smith
(Floor Remarks As Prepared for Delivery)
July 8, 2015*

This week, the world pauses to remember and reflect on the Srebrenica genocide—horrific acts of brutality, wanton cruelty and mass murder committed in Srebrenica beginning July 11th, twenty years ago.

This week we pause to honor those brave Bosniaks who suffered and died—victims of genocide.

This week the people of the United States, and men and women of goodwill throughout the world—again extend our deepest condolences and respect to the mothers and surviving family members who have endured unspeakable sorrow and loss that time will never abate.

And this week the international community must recommit itself to bringing to justice once and for all those who perpetrated these heinous crimes. Today, Ratko Mladic and Radovan Karadzic are incarcerated, awaiting final disposition of their cases before the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) for multiple counts of genocide, crimes against humanity, and violations of laws and customs of war.

Twenty years ago, an estimated 8,000 people were systematically slaughtered by Bosnian Serb soldiers in the United Nations designated “safe haven” area of Srebrenica.

They killed Muslim women and children and especially sought out and murdered the adult male population.

These brutal killings were not committed in battle. They were committed against people who were unarmed and helpless and who had been repeatedly assured by Dutch peacekeepers that they would not be harmed if they surrendered. The evidence is overwhelming that the executions were committed with specific intention of destroying the Bosnian Muslim population of the area. This intention is the central element in the crime of genocide.

The U.N. peacekeeping forces in Srebrenica (UNPROFOR) were charged with enforcing Security Council Resolution 836, which had pledged to defend the safe areas with “all necessary means, including the use of force.” But when the moment of truth came, the U.N. forces offered only token resistance to the Serb offensive. Their military and political commanders had redefined their primary mission not as the protection of the people of Srebrenica, but as the safety of the U.N. forces themselves. When Bosnian Serb commander Ratko Mladic threatened violence against the blue-helmeted U.N. soldiers, here is the way one of those soldiers described the reaction. I quote: “Everybody got a fright. You could easily get killed in such an operation. As far as I knew, we had not been sent to Srebrenica to defend the enclave, but rather as some kind of spruced-up observers.”

So that is what the peacekeepers became. Observers to genocide. Soon they became something more than observers. On July 13, the Dutch blue-helmet battalion handed Bosnian Muslims who had sought safety within the U.N. compound over to the Serbs. They watched as the men were separated from the women and the children, a process which was already well known in Bosnia as a sign that the men were in imminent danger of death. These men were never heard from again.

At one Congressional hearing I chaired in March of 1998—one of several human rights hearing on Bosnia that I chaired—Hasan Nuhanovic, the translator for U.N. Peacekeepers in Srebrenica testified.

Hasan lost his family in the genocide. He was in the room when Dutch Peacekeepers and Mladic arranged for the surrender of thousands of Muslim men. He told my panel:

“On July 12, the day before the fall of Srebrenica, the Bosnian Serb Army (BSA) commander, General Ratko Mladic, requested a meeting with Dutchbat commander, Lieutenant Colonel Karemans, and local representatives of Srebrenica in the nearby town of Bratunac outside the enclave... During the meeting, Mladic assured the Dutch and local delegation that no harm would come to the refugees in Potocari...”

Upon returning to the camp, three local representatives are ordered by Dutchbat deputy commander, Major Franken, to prepare a list of all males, all men and boys between the ages of 16 and 65 among the refugees inside and outside the camp. The list of the males among the 6,000 inside the camp was completed the same day....

On 13 July, the Dutch ordered 6,000 refugees out of the Potocari camp. The Serbs were waiting at the gate, separating all males from the women and children. Major Franken stated that all the males whose name were on the list would be safe... I watched my parents and my brother being handed over to the Serbs at the gate. None of them have been seen since...

I want to explain here that the people hoped that the Dutch were going to protect them, the U. N. peacekeeping troops and all other members of all other organizations who were present in Srebrenica who were inside the camp, the people hoped that they would be protected, but the Dutch soldiers and officer gave no other option to the refugees but to leave. So the refugees inside were told to leave without any other choice. My family was told on the evening of 13 July that they should leave. About 6 p.m. there were no more refugees inside the camp.

I don't know if this is the topic of the meeting or hearing, but the same night the Dutch soldiers had a party inside the camp because they received two or three trucks full of beer and cigarettes. They played music while I was sitting, not knowing what happened to my family.”

At the time I and a small group of other members, including Senator Dole, called for lifting the arms embargo on Bosnia – it was a tragedy that this was not done earlier, as it would probably have

prevented the genocide. Since 1995 I have worked to see to it that the perpetrators of these horrific acts are punished and that closure is provided to survivors and victims' families.

In July 2007, I was in Srebrenica, where, together with my good friends President Haris Silajdzic and the Grand Mufti of Bosnia, Reis Ceric, spoke at a solemn memorial service and witnessed the internment of hundreds of wooden coffins of newly discovered victims of the genocide. It was a deeply moving experience to see, 12 years after the genocide, families still grieving loved ones whose bodies were being identified, often miles from the killing sites, as Serb forces, trying to hide the evidence of their crimes, moved the bodies of their victims.

Ten years ago, in 2005, the House overwhelmingly passed H. Res. 199, which I authored, and which clearly and unambiguously condemned the Srebrenica massacre for what it was: genocide. That resolution was a landmark in the recognition of Srebrenica massacre as a genocide. Two years later the verdict of the International Court of Justice found the same, in confirming a ruling of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia. Today the international community is nearly unanimous when it proclaims that the Srebrenica massacre was a genocide. My resolution today reaffirms the U.S. support for this fact—and conveys our deepest condolences to the family and friends of the victims.

Astonishingly, there are some genocide deniers. That is why this resolution condemns statements that deny that the massacre at Srebrenica constituted genocide. Just last weekend, Milorad Dodik, President of Republika Srpska, asserted that the Srebrenica genocide is a lie.

Mr. Speaker, just as it is doing in Ukraine, Russia is utilizing misinformation and historical revisionism in an attempt to destabilize Bosnia and the Balkan region. Today, Russia vetoed a British UN Security Council resolution that reaffirms the Srebrenica massacre as genocide. Russia has encouraged Serbia to protest the resolution and emboldened genocide denialism in Republika Srpska, one of Bosnia's two constituent entities.

Mr. Speaker, this resolution also encourages the Administration to fulfill other neglected responsibilities. In particular, it urges the Atrocities Prevention Board to study the lessons of Srebrenica and issue informed guidance on how to prevent similar incidents from recurring in the future. As you may recall, the Atrocities Prevention Board is a U.S. interagency committee established by the Administration in 2012 to flag potential atrocities. However, since its creation the Board has been marked by inaction and a complete lack of transparency. This is unacceptable, especially as conflicts with disturbing parallels to Bosnia before the genocide continue to fester in Syria, Central African Republic, Burma, and Burundi.

Africa, in particular, would stand to benefit from a more active Board. The conflict in Burundi is currently at a tipping point.

H. Res. 310 also recognizes the impressive achievement of the International Commission for Missing Persons, or ICMP. Starting in Bosnia, this Commission has since been active in accounting for those missing in conflicts or natural disasters around the world. It deserves justified recognition for its assistance to Bosnia in accounting for nearly ninety percent of those reported missing after the Srebrenica genocide and seventy percent of those reported missing during the whole of the conflict in Bosnia. The mere existence of the ICMP is a sign of a lesson learned, namely that bringing closure to families leads to healing in and among community, which leads to post-conflict recovery and reconciliation, which leads to regional stability and true security.