

SREBRENICA WEAVERS BRING A MESSAGE OF HOPE TO WASHINGTON, DC

AdvocacyNet

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Washington DC: Survivors from the notorious 1995 massacre at Srebrenica, Bosnia, are using hand-woven carpets (kilims) to bring their message of hard work and reconciliation to Washington.

A public exhibition of carpets from Srebrenica will be hosted on April 1, 2004 in Washington by The Advocacy Project (AP), a Washington-based non-profit that employs graduate students from Georgetown and works with civil society in Srebrenica.

The carpets were woven by members of Bosfam, an organization of women who were widowed or displaced during Bosnia's three-year war (1992-1995). Many of the weavers lost male relatives after the town of Srebrenica fell to the Bosnian Serb Army on July 11, 1995. Women, old people and children were bussed across the lines to the town of Tuzla. Over 7,000 men and boys over the age of 15 were slaughtered.

Srebrenica itself has been largely shunned by aid agencies, and remains physically and spiritually desolate. According to the United Nations, only 2,300 Muslims have returned, out of the town's pre-war Muslim population of 28,000. Most of the massacre survivors live in refugee shelters in Tuzla, traumatized and impoverished.

Bosfam is one of the very few organizations that offers them real support. Since it was founded, in 1994, Bosfam has trained hundreds of women to weave kilims, sweaters, knitted wool socks and even fashionable dresses. In addition, the organization seeks to promote ethnic reconciliation by opening its doors - and its looms - to both Serb and Croat women who also suffered during the war.

As well as offering an opportunity to work, the Bosfam center provides members with psychological support. In the words of Beba Hadzic, the founder of Bosfam, many of the Srebrenica survivors live in a state of "permanent desperation" because they do not know the fate of their lost relatives.

For most, the uncertainty may never end. After eight years, only 1,252 victims from the massacre have been identified and buried, according to a spokesperson from the International Commission on Missing Persons, a body that was set up by the 1996 G-7 Summit at the urging of former US President Bill Clinton. The Commission has 3,600 body bags still in storage, each bearing human remains, and it could be years before they are identified - even though the use of DNA has speeded up identification. Mass graves are still being uncovered in Eastern Bosnia

Making matters worse, the International Criminal Tribunal in The Hague has only indicted 13 persons in connection with Srebrenica, of whom only six have been arrested and charged. The

architect of the massacre, the former Bosnian Serb General Ratko Mladic, remains at large. Some known killers have even been spotted in Srebrenica itself - further discouraging the return of refugees.

Bosfam has now extended its weaving project to Srebrenica, where 45 women are now at work. The first carpet was produced in March by Hajra Djozic, a former refugee who lost a brother in the massacre. The hope is that the Bosfam center will not only help the town's devastated economy but also attract back more refugees.

Twenty kilims will be displayed in Washington. All were individually woven, and bear the name of their weaver. As well as rich in color, they also use traditional Bosnian patterns that have been handed down from mother to daughter. The largest kilims, which measure nine square meters, can take up to three months to weave. Weaving provides the only source of income for many Bosfam members.

The April 1 exhibition will promote Bosfam's inspiring message of reconciliation and take orders for carpets. Any profits will go to Bosfam's weaving centers in Tuzla and Srebrenica. A short film about Bosfam - shot and edited by Georgetown students - will also be shown.

The Advocacy Project has supported Bosfam for two years. During 2003, AP helped Bosfam design a website, and raised over \$4,000 for Bosfam's weavers. AP will be sending a graduate student from Georgetown's Business School, Pia Schneider, to work with Bosfam this summer. Pia will help Bosfam to prepare a business plan and market carpets on its own.

- Location: The Chastleton Ballroom, 1701 16th St. NW, Washington D.C. 20009. Date: April 1, 2004. Time: 6 p.m. - 10 p.m (refreshments). Film presentation: 7 p.m. For further information contact Evelina: 202 468-6474, or 202 332 3900.
- Read about civil society's role in the [rebuilding of Srebrenica](#)