

SREBRENICA'S RESURGENT CIVIL SOCIETY LAUNCHES CAMPAIGN FOR
NEW CENTER AND POSTS NEW WEBSITE

AdvocacyNet

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Srebrenica, Bosnia, June 19, 2003: A network of 17 nongovernmental organizations, many representing Serbs and Muslims, has launched a major campaign to establish a center for civil society in the heart of Srebrenica, scene of the infamous 1995 massacre.

The NGO network, known as the Forum of Srebrenica NGOs, is seeking 100,000 Euros (\$117,000) to restore a war-damaged building in the center of the town. The building has been promised to the Forum by the local government, free of rent, but needs major repair.

The campaign will be promoted on the network's new web site which has been designed by a Bosnian IT firm under the direction of the Advocacy Project.

The Forum's campaign and new web site, which were both launched at a press conference in Srebrenica on Thursday, are a mark of the resurgence of civil society in Southeastern Bosnia. The region remains a bastion of Bosnian Serb nationalism and continues to resist the large-scale return of Muslim refugees from the Bosnian war. According to the UN, only 1,170 former Muslim inhabitants have returned to Srebrenica, out of more than 30,000 expelled during the war.

Founded in 2001, the Forum has emerged as a major advocate for Srebrenica's reconstruction and the return of refugees. It is also the best guarantor that donors will not forget the town's terrible history - and the needs of Serb and Muslim refugees - in the drive for economic growth. The Forum's membership has doubled in the last six months, in a sign of its growing appeal.

Once restored, the new center will serve as a vital hub for civil society from Srebrenica and the neighboring municipalities of Bratunac and Milici, and make it easier for NGOs to coordinate their activities with aid donors, and their advocacy.

The Forum's new web site, which is in Bosnian and English, will also boost its advocacy, by allowing the Forum's diverse membership to present a united front to the international community and to refugees. At the same time, the site will contain profiles of the Forum's individual members, background information on Srebrenica and a special interactive section with legal advice.

Content for the site has been written by members of the Forum, under the direction of Peter Lippman from the Advocacy Project. The site was designed by the Tuzla-based Center for Information Technology (CIT), which also provided web site training for the

Forum. One of AP's goals has been to ensure that the site can be used and maintained by the Forum, instead of relying on outside expertise.

(This to be rewritten by Peter) Thursday's press conference was itself an important event in the rebirth of Srebrenica. It was attended by print and radio journalists from both Bosnian entities. In one article, Mr x from y described the Forum as '....'

Funding for the project has been provided by the Dutch Refugee Foundation.

The Advocacy Project is based in Washington D.C. Phone: +1 202 758 3328. Visit the AP web site for information about current projects <http://advocacynet.org/>. For more information please e-mail dcoffice@advocacynet.org.