

On the Record: The Road to Srebrenica

Issue 16. The blogs of Iain Guest, June 2004



The author of these blogs, Iain Guest (left) first visited the BOSFAM weavers in 1993, during the war in Bosnia. After AP was established in 1998, BOSFAM became an early AP partner. The first of several interns (Peace Fellows) volunteered at BOSFAM in 2003. Iain visited eastern Bosnia the following year to pick up the story of returning refugees and assess the campaign to bring perpetrators of the massacre to justice. He is shown above with Beba in Tuzla. Contact Iain: iain@advocacynet.org

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From the AP Editorial Desk

July 11, 2005 will mark the tenth anniversary of the 1995 Srebrenica massacre in Bosnia, which claimed the lives of between 7,000 and 10,000 Bosnian Muslims.

The forthcoming anniversary will be a somber event. The International Criminal Tribunal has only indicted 13 Bosnian Serbs in connection with the massacre – and of these five are still at large. Reconstruction aid started to flow to Srebrenica after municipal elections were held in 2000, but it has not been sufficient to revive the economy or trigger a large-scale return of refugees. Only about a thousand Muslims have returned to their former homes, out of the pre-war population of 30,000.

At the same time, the story of Srebrenica is one of heroism, resilience and determination. Instead of succumbing to despair and sadness, the survivors of Srebrenica have insisted that the legacy of this crime is addressed. They have also stiffened the resolve of the international community. There was little stomach for rebuilding Srebrenica until small groups of refugees took matters into their own hands in late 1999 and began to move back into their villages in the hills around Srebrenica, braving the winter and intimidation.

The survivors have not allowed the world to forget. On July 11 July 2000, several busloads of Muslims returned to commemorate the massacre at Potocari, where the 1995 events began. This shamed the international community into action, and the site has since been turned into a shrine. A large memorial has been built, and several hundred massacre victims have been reburied in a mass cemetery. (Photo below). The former battery factory, which served as the base for the



Dutch battalion of UN peacekeepers, is to be turned into a museum. The survivors have not always been easy to work with, but the world owes them a huge debt.

The Advocacy Project has supported these brave Bosnians for five years. This support has taken several forms:

*** Promotion:** In 2000, Peter Lippman, from AP, visited the first wave of returnees in the ruins

of their former houses above Srebrenica. His reports were distributed by AP.

By 2002, the refugees were moving back to Srebrenica itself, and Lippman returned to profile the work of the Forum of Srebrenica NGOs, a network of Muslim and Serb NGOs which formed to lobby for reconstruction. Lippman also wrote about Bosfam, a women's group that runs a carpet-weaving center for widows in Tuzla. Lippman's profiles were sent out by e-mail, and turned into an illustrated webpage on the AP site. These pages are among the most heavily-visited on our site.

In the summer of 2003, Aspen Brinton from AP attended the mass burial of victims and filmed material for a short film on Bosfam. An excerpt of the film is available [here](#).

In June 2004, AP's Director Iain Guest visited Tuzla, Srebrenica and The Hague and produced a series of weblogs (blogs) that are reproduced on the following pages.

*** Photographs:** These missions have generated over 100 photographs, which can be found in the photo library on this site: http://www.flickr.com/photos/advocacy_project/. These photos are available for use, free of charge.

*** Information on capacity-building:** AP's goal has always been that partners will be able to promote their own message and also use their websites and contacts to generate income for their campaigns and members. Working with a grant from the Dutch Refugee Foundation (<http://www.vluchteling.org/index.asp>) Peter Lippman helped the Forum and Bosfam to design their own web pages (<http://www.bosfam.ba/>).

* **Interns:** AP has also sent two interns to work with Bosfam in the summers of 2003 and 2004. Both interns produced blogs on their work. This coming summer, Mackenzie Frady, from the School of Business (Georgetown University) will be working with Bosfam as an intern.

* **Promotion and Fundraising:** AP has displayed Bosfam's carpets at three events in the United States. Together, these have raised over \$5,000 for the weavers of Bosfam.

* **Future plans:** AP is hoping to bring all of these strands together around the 10th anniversary. In February of this year, Bosfam opened a small weaving center in Srebrenica with funds from the Dutch Refugee Foundation. Bosfam hopes to produce several carpets at the center which will be taken to Europe and the United States this coming summer by two Bosfam delegations, and distributed at events commemorating the 10th anniversary.

This will give the Bosfam widows a chance to remember the events of 1995, and also raise funds for their weaving center.

AP needs volunteers to help these delegations. Please contact us as info@advocacynet.org.

#1 Bosfam's Struggle to Become a Business

Tuzla, Bosnia, June 8: Bosfam was created in 1993 by Beba Hadzic, who was head of the Srebrenica Primary School until she was expelled in 1992. For two years, Bosfam trained displaced Bosnian women from Eastern Bosnia in weaving and knitting.

Bosfam's work expanded exponentially after the 1995 Srebrenica massacre, when thousands of distraught women and children were expelled to Tuzla while their menfolk were being slaughtered.



Nura (left) and Beba Hadzic, at the Bosfam center in Tuzla

Knitting is therapeutic for traumatized women refugees, and Bosfam was much in demand after the massacre. Beba Hadzic, the Bosfam director, reckons that Bosfam had projects in 44 refugee collective centers – 14 in Tuzla alone – and provided comfort to thousands of women. Donors were grateful, and Bosfam turned to more sophisticated

products, like the traditional carpets (kilims) which AP has been exhibiting in the United States. The UK paid for new looms. USAID and UNHCR even put up funds for a new weaving center in Tuzla, which Bosfam now owns. Bosfam house is set in a leafy side street and is spacious

enough to hold several large looms, offices, a shop, a store house and a meeting room. It has an air of comfortable permanence.

There's just one problem: Bosfam was created to cater to refugees. Those refugees now need to go home or build a new life.

As the fury of the Bosnian conflict has receded, humanitarian aid has dried up, depriving Bosfam of its main source of income. Even NATO can't be relied upon. Bosfam has a small concession stand at the nearby US Army ("Eagle") base, and it has sold souvenirs to departing SFOR troops. But the US is drawing down its Bosnian contingent, and the current crop are from the state of Indiana. For some reason they're stingier than other states. Last month, Bosfam only sold 20 dollars worth of knitted products at Eagle Base.

At the same time, Bosfam is rich in assets: it can draw on over 300 skilled women weavers and knitters, in Tuzla and Srebrenica, has a stock of truly gorgeous carpets, and a dedicated staff that is prepared to work without pay.



Somehow these assets have to be turned into a sustainable business that brings in an income to the weavers, and helps refugees return to Srebrenica, instead of condemning them to permanent exile here in Tuzla. That's the challenge facing Pia.

It won't be easy. As we leave the office, one of the weavers, Nura, is still working at her loom, plucking away at a deep rich blue weave. The color is beautiful, the rhythm is mesmerizing, and Nura (a tiny, waif-like figure who lost her husband in the massacre) is at peace, in a world of her own.

The only problem is, no one has ordered this carpet. Once made, it will join the growing pile in the warehouse, waiting for a buyer.

Above: Coping with sadness - Nura takes comfort from weaving at BOSFAM's Tuzla center

#2 The Importance of Coffee

Tuzla, Bosnia, Tuesday June 8, 2004: Every day at Bosfam house begins with coffee. Marta Schaaf, who worked with Bosfam for AP last year, wrote movingly about the importance of these meetings, which are much more than just a coffee break. This is an opportunity for the Bosfam staff to share their fears and confidences with each other, and with strangers. Pia, Marta's successor, tells me she didn't drink coffee before coming here. Now she gets several cups a day and is on the verge of addiction.

Today's coffee break is interrupted by Hajra Djozic, who's just arrived from Srebrenica, where she now lives. Hajra is a long-time member of Bosfam, and one of their most skilled weavers. Two days ago the Srebrenica police came to the village where she lived before the war and started asking for her brother. He was killed in the 1995 massacre. This episode, adding insult to injury, has unnerved Hajra and she's come to seek reassurance from her friends at Bosfam. She'll return to Srebrenica later today.

As Hajra tells her story, tears start to well up in the eyes of Bula, another young woman who works at Bosfam. Pia tells me that Bula routinely breaks down at the coffee meetings, and seems to be trapped in a deep and inconsolable sadness. She lost two brothers in the massacre, and has gone through two nasty divorces. Bula's hands shake so much that she can't work at a loom. She cleans, makes tea and smiles through her tears.

Beba Hadzic, the Bosfam director, nods, murmurs and comforts Hajra. It's at these meetings that one gets a real sense of Beba's authority and her importance to the women. All her life, Beba has refused to be bullied. For ten years she headed the Srebrenica primary school. In 1991 the SDA (Muslim party) told her to join the party. She rejected any political affiliation, and was demoted.

Beba continued to work at the school until the beginning of the war, in the spring of 1992, when the first wave of Muslims was expelled from the town. Bosnian Serbs stripped everyone of their valuables before they left, and killed those who resisted, but Beba managed to retain her watch and her wedding ring. They are, she says, her most precious belongings.

Like many charismatic leaders, Beba exercises a dominant role at Bosfam. The organization is entirely too dependent on her, but at these coffee meetings one understands how important her strength is to these other traumatized women. Though sobered by Hajra's ordeal, they seem a little less fearful when they stand up to leave and wash out the thick Turkish coffee grinds.

Most aid programmers would never understand the importance of meetings like this, let alone put a dollar value on them. But this is the glue that holds women's civil society together, and makes Bosfam a force to be reckoned with.

#3. In the Refugee Center of Mihatovici

Tuzla, Bosnia June 8: I arrived in the Bosnian town of Tuzla last Saturday to visit the weavers of Bosfam. As anyone familiar with the Advocacy Project will know, Bosfam is the women's group that trains displaced Bosnian women from Eastern Bosnia in weaving and knitting. Many of its beneficiaries were widowed after the 1995 massacre at Srebrenica.

Pia Schneider, our intern from the Georgetown Business school, has been with Bosfam for a week and the weather has been getting her down. Tuzla has none of the architectural grace of Sarajevo, or the natural beauty of Srebrenica. Its high-rises look particularly unappealing through rain.

Today Pia and I visited the largest refugee collective center for refugees from Srebrenica. Our goal was to try and find out how many would return home if they had the chance.



The international community is giving up on return. We've heard that most of the Srebrenica refugees have now been in exile for so long – nine years since the massacre – that they've "built new lives" and have no wish to return to their original homes. Even Beba Hadzic of Bosfam, talks of her former home in gloomy terms: "Srebrenica empties in the afternoon," she says. There are no jobs, and no night life. "There is sadness everywhere." Who would want to go home? Well, Beba's husband for one. He works in the Srebrenica municipality. We're looking forward to meeting him.

Left: Nijaza Kharic hams it up in the Mihatovici refugee center, Tuzla

Pia and I will gauge the mood in Srebrenica when we visit tomorrow, but in the meantime we need to know what life is like for those refugees who are still in exile. This takes us to Mihatovici, which was built with Norwegian aid for 1,500 Srebrenica survivors. The Swiss Red Cross provides basic services, but will be pulling out soon.

Ten years later, 950 refugees are still living here, and the vast majority are survivors from the 1995 massacre. From a distance, Mihatovici looks like an alpine village, but close up it's a lot like any refugee camp. The dwellings are more permanent, but boredom hangs in the air, kids play in the dusty streets, and the garbage piles up. The people are dirt poor. Some scrape a living from odd jobs in Tuzla. The luckiest are widows of soldiers. who receive an army pension of 350 Bosnian marks (\$225) a month.

In two hours we do not meet a single family that wants to remain here. All, without exception, want to return to Srebrenica - so that myth can be laid to rest. The problem is that their houses have been destroyed and there's no work. The solution? Rebuild the houses and find people work, and you create a magnet for return.

The question is - what kind of work? The answer is to be found hanging on the clothes lines, covering the tables, worn by the kids, and collecting mud in front of doors. Carpets, sweaters, clothes are everywhere - and all of them were made here. These people have knitting and weaving in their blood. One old lady drums away with her knitting needles as she hams for my camera. Nijaza Kharic, who invites us in for a tea, displays yards of delicate crochet that she has woven, with little hope of selling.

It's the same thing we see at Bosfam and it leads us to conclude that the reconstruction of Srebrenica should be built upon small family businesses, particularly those involving women. Why not start with looms and sewing machines?

#4. Driving to Srebrenica

Kravica, June 9: Today we leave for Srebrenica with Beba Hadzic, the director of Bosfam. I cannot help thinking, as we pull away from Tuzla, that we're traveling the same route as the women and children who were bussed away from Srebrenica almost ten years ago, leaving their sons and fathers behind in the hands of Serb killers.

When Srebrenica fell to the Serbs on July 11, 1995 the besieged population headed in two different directions. About 20,000 walked down the road to the village of Potocari, to seek safety from the UN Dutch battalion. The men and boys over the age of 15 were taken off to be killed, and the women put on buses and driven to Kladanj, still in Bosnian Serb territory. Some of the elderly and even some women were killed - the rest were left to walk to Tuzla.

Several thousand others – some say as many as 15,000 – decided to take to the woods in a desperate attempt to reach Tuzla across the mountains. The plan was that soldiers would go in the front and follow up in the rear, so as to provide protection for the civilians in between.



The advance guard engaged the Serbs near Zvornik and broke through the lines. Some 3,000 managed to get through. But the Serbs rushed in reinforcements, regrouped, and systematically picked the rest of the column apart. There were countless ambushes. Those who were not killed were taken off to Bratunac, where they were held until while the Serbs decided where they were to be murdered.

About 1,500 Muslims were rounded up and taken to the village of Kravica, which lies on the road between Tuzla and Srebrenica. Many were taken into an agricultural cooperative center where they were stabbed, beaten or shot to death.

The center still stands, rusted and peeling, beside the main road, and the sight of it sends a shudder through Beba. It's a mystery why the Serbs haven't pulled the wretched building down, but Kravica was overrun for a time by the Muslim army from Srebrenica during the war, and hatred between the Serbs of Kravica and the Muslims of Srebrenica runs deep. Beba says that the villagers of Kravica come out to jeer when Muslims return to Srebrenica to commemorate the events of July 11 every year.

Five kilometers out of Srebrenica, the fields of Potocari, where the 20,000 Srebrenicans were assembled and separated in 1995, are being turned into a massive, dignified, memorial site. The memorial has evolved from a small granite stone, constructed in 2000 (which the local Serbs accepted with very bad grace), into something quite grand, with water fountains and elegant mown lawns.

The last time I was here, on March 31, 2003, the scene was one of frantic desperation as thousands of relatives buried the bodies of 600 victims who had been identified. The scene will be repeated again this coming July 11, when more bodies will be buried, but today there are almost no visitors. Many plots have space reserved for relatives who are known to have died but have yet to be found. Beba, who lost a brother-in-law and nephew in the massacre, is anxious to be on her way. She does not like this place.

The memorial is run by a foundation which has even received funds from the government of the Serb Republic (as part of a legal settlement). The foundation is administered from an office in the otherwise derelict battery factory on the opposite side of the road. It was here that the UN Dutch battalion was headquartered, and here that the townspeople sought refuge on July 11, 1995.

This squat and ugly building has become infamous as a symbol of the UN's inability to protect victims of war, and it is perhaps fitting that there are plans to turn it into a museum, containing a definitive list of those who have disappeared, photos, and personal belongings of victims. Something like the Holocaust museum. This is all part of remembering the past, and no doubt valuable. But a part of me wishes that the international community would put as much effort and money into tracking down those who did the killing and into the needs of the survivors.

We continue up the winding road to Srebrenica itself, past a bombed-out milk factory where I served as an OSCE election monitor in November 2000. This brings back some strange memories. During election night, our Serb vote counters smoked incessantly and praised democracy, because in this ward at least hard-line Serb nationalists were certain to be elected. Every now and then I would go to the back of the room where a shell had gouged out part of the wall and peer out at the moonlit battery factory, as a sort of reality check.

I also remember how meticulously our Serb counters tallied up the votes, and how they chided me for presuming to monitor their own elections while America's electoral system was the laughing stock of the world. (This was the time of Bush v Gore and the hanging chads of Florida). These vote counters from Srebrenica were determined to show they could do it better. I later heard that at least several had probably killed Muslims during the 1995 massacre.

Before reaching Srebrenica, we stop briefly at the house of Magbula, one of the most experienced Bosfam weavers who has returned from Tuzla to Srebrenica. Magbula lost her husband, a son, brother and two nephews in the massacre, and her sorrowful profile (written by Peter Lippman of our project) can be found on the website of the International Campaign to raise funds for the Victims Trust of the new International Criminal Court.

But today, in Srebrenica, Magbula has become a symbol of hope. Her house has been repaired with international aid. Its whitewashed walls glisten in the sunshine and the garden is alive with color. Magbula has a small loom on loan from Bosfam and we all hope that she will soon start to make carpets for Bosfam.

Magbula is not here to welcome us in person because her daughter-in-law has just given birth to a child in Tuzla. It's a wondrous event for Magbula, her sole surviving son, and her friends at

Bosfam. After so much pain and death, Magbula is once again experiencing the joy of birth. I wonder if the same can ever be true of Srebrenica.

#5. In the Presence of Ghosts

Srebrenica, June 9: Before the war, Srebrenica was one of Bosnia's most picturesque towns, and it still retains much of its Alpine charm. But reminders of war are all around, in the ruined houses, the pock-marked walls, and the graves. Particularly the graves. Between 1993 and 1995, 40,000 people were crammed into the town, and as the space shrank they were forced to bury the dead further and further up the hillside. Way up on the hillsides, some of the graves look like small flocks of sheep.

In the past I have stayed at the Domavia hotel. Muslim soldiers were billeted in the hotel during the war and one had scratched his name and a message inside the door of my room. I remember wondering whether he had ended up in a mass grave.

Srebrenica has this effect upon visitors. You feel as though you're walking among ghosts. The feeling never completely disappears, but it does begin to fade, particularly when the weather is kind. Today, Srebrenica is relaxed, and some of the small stalls are selling delicious strawberries. Hungarian soldiers from SFOR (NATO's Stabilisation Force) are lounging near a bar, with not much to do. Old people are passing time in the small park, next to swings.

One can understand why refugees in the drab collective centers of Tuzla want to return here, but Beba's own aspirations are more complicated. Her husband works for the Srebrenica municipality during the week, and lives in their apartment (which also serves as the Bosfam office in Srebrenica). But Beba herself has built a new life in Tuzla, where she is well-known and respected for Bosfam's work since 1992.

Srebrenica, however, feels less like home. Beba finds Srebrenica sad and sometimes even frightening. On one visit she ran into a former colleague at her school who had turned into an ardent Serb nationalist and was filmed with the Bosnian Serb general Ratko Mladic on the eve of the massacre. Despite his apparent role in the killing he still walks the streets of Srebrenica. We drive past the house of Beba's sister, Djefa, who lost a husband and son in the massacre and is so traumatized that she finds even Tuzla too closely associated with her former life. Djefa is planning to move to Sarajevo.



Left: The Guber springs once attracted tourists from all over Europe

At the same time, Beba is proud to show us where she was raised in Srebrenica. The family lived in the upper part of the town, on Crni Guber street, with plenty of relatives around, and it must have been idyllic. Many

houses look intact and a few have flower boxes, but most are empty. The house of Beba's parents is locked and the garden unkempt, but it still belongs to the family, if and when they are ready to reclaim it. It must have been a warm and spacious home.

Beba also takes us up to the Guber spring, which produces water that is heavy in minerals and supposed to have great healing powers. Guber used to draw tourists from all over Europe. It was also a favorite haunt for young lovers before the war, and the site of a well-known restaurant. All that remains now are ruins and the spring, which leaves a dark copper stain on the ground.

It's easy to picture Beba here in the 1980s. She led a life of privilege in a wealthy, integrated and peaceful village town. She was director of the primary school, and owned an apartment and a summer house near the river Drina where she and her husband would retreat at the end of a busy week. (The house is now in ruins). As each glimpse of her former life unfolds, like the pages of a photo album, we get a sense of how drastically her fortunes have changed since the war.

Even so, she would be the first to admit that she remains privileged compared to most of Bosfam's members. Part of this is luck – not least the fact that her husband and son survived. But a lot of it is Beba's own pluck and determination. She has helped many people to recover from unimaginable trauma. Very few people are given that opportunity, and even fewer are able to rise to the challenge.

#6. Where is the Work?

Srebrenica, June 9: A job to do and a roof over one's head - these are what will draw the refugees back to Srebrenica, as Pia and I learned in the Mihatovici refugee center in Tuzla.

As a result, one of our first visits in Srebrenica is to the office of the UN Development Programme, which is coordinating an international economic recovery program for donors.

Srebrenica and its outlying villages – particularly Potocari - used to be an important center of light industry. The region produced silver, bauxite, and lumber, and was one of the richest areas of Bosnia. Following the massacre, it was shunned by the international community, partly in order not to reward the authors of the massacre and partly because the Serbs who ran the town resisted any return by Muslims.

The result was a vicious circle, because without aid or investment there was nothing to encourage Muslims to return anyway. This suited the Serbs just fine, because it allowed them to plunder what remained of Srebrenica's former riches. Today, they have a lock on the once-profitable lumber industry.

Srebrenica remains a deeply unattractive place for private investors. Since my last visit, the only sign of new activity is a Slovenian meat factory. Which leaves international aid. Instead of rebuilding the industrial sector, the aid agencies are concentrating on infrastructure, small agricultural enterprises, and the repair of houses. The money, however, is slowing: the UNDP has appealed for \$12.3 million, but only \$6.2 has been raised and about \$4 million so far disbursed.

Of this, about a million has gone on infrastructure (roads, water etc) and another \$700,000 has been spent on creating about 170 small businesses, mostly agricultural. Alexandre Prieto, program manager for the UNDP, tells us that it will take at least \$35 million to make a visible difference in Srebrenica. This is a depressing prediction.

In an effort to encourage private enterprise, UNDP is planning to give out one-off grants of up to \$10,000, on condition that the would-be entrepreneurs delegate one of their members to receive training in advance, register as a company, find a space, and come up with a business plan. One company that is helping is the American butter company Land O Lakes, which is supporting a dairy cooperative. (Land O Lakes was one logo we did not expect to see in Srebrenica!).

UNDP wants to keep these grants strictly separate from its support for civil society. Later, in Tuzla, I ask Beba if Bosfam might consider applying for a UNDP grant and set up an autonomous for-profit branch of Bosfam for the carpet weavers like Magbula who have returned to Srebrenica. An injection of \$10,000 might buy them looms and set up a training center in Beba's apartment. The Srebrenica branch could then send its carpets to Bosfam in Tuzla, to be sold.



Left: Several houses were rebuilt for returning refugees and burned down by locals in 2000

This is Beba's ultimate strategy, but she would like it done by Bosfam, not a new business. That, she says, would mean paying taxes, finding lawyers, nominating a board – and, of course, splitting Bosfam. Beba also finds it strange that UNDP is drawing such a clear distinction between NGOs and business. It is true that NGOs like Bosfam do social work, but Beba herself realizes that Bosfam will only

survive if it can sell its products on a sustainable basis. In fact, all of Srebrenica's NGOs will have to become entrepreneurs if they are to stay alive. This makes me feel that agencies like UNDP should be doing more, not less, to encourage NGOs to adopt business practices.

But UNDP's basic strategy - sprinkling venture capital around, in the hope of planting the seeds of private enterprise - is surely laudable. The real question is whether one year is sufficient, given the barren economic climate. Private enterprise, like democracy, needs time to grow, and we are told that as many as 15% of the 170 small businesses funded by the UNDP in Srebrenica have already failed. It may take a more sustained investment than one-off grants of \$10,000 to rebuild the economy – even from the bottom up.

One thing everyone seems to agree on: UNDP has to do a better job of explaining what it is up to in Srebrenica. UNDP needs to overhaul its public relations. At the same time, local civil society should get its act together and start asking some tough questions, before the donors pull out altogether.

#7. The Courage to Return

Srebrenica, June 9: Pia and I stay in the hotel Misirlije on Petrica street in the north of the village. The hotel has the best restaurant in town, and is run by Abdula Purkovic, or “Dula” as he is popularly known.

Dula’s girth is a splendid advertisement for his profession. He taught cooking at the secondary school in Srebrenica for many years before the war, leading me to wonder how many restaurants in this ultra-nationalist part of the Bosnian Serb Republic are indebted to this former Muslim refugee.

Dula is solicitous towards his clients. The first night we are disappointed to learn that there is cheese burek on the menu, but not meat burek. (Burek is a popular local dish made with layers of pastry). Dula makes sure that a massive tray of meat burek is ready for our fare-well breakfast.

Dula is one of some 2,300 Bosniaks (Muslims) who have returned to the Srebrenica municipality, out of the pre-war population of 28,000. After almost ten years, this is fairly dismal, and we need to ask whether the international community has done enough to create the conditions for return.

The record is mixed. As soon as NATO became more visible in the area, in the late 1990s, security improved dramatically and attacks against returning Muslims effectively ceased. Throughout Bosnia, the international administration has also been vigorously enforcing property laws – something that we’ll explore in a future blog.

But there is no money for a comprehensive economic investment plan, and no signs of real political cooperation between local Serb and Muslim politicians. The international community has forced an inter-ethnic local government on Srebrenica by encouraging former Muslim inhabitants in Tuzla to cast absentee ballots in local elections, and this has produced a Muslim majority on the municipal council. But we are told that almost none of the Muslim councilors actually live in Srebrenica, which is hardly an incentive for others to return.



Left: Master of the burek - Abdula Purkovic

Ultimately, however, it is Bosnians like Dula, not the international community, who will decide whether or not Srebrenica can recover. Most of the returnees have gone back to villages around the town, where they are less likely to attract unfriendly attention. But returning to the town itself requires considerable nerve, as we learn from our translator, a delightful 17 year-old named Begzada Halilovic.

Begzada's family lives near Dula's restaurant in the upper reaches of the town. Begzada, her mother and brother left for Zagreb in 1992, but her father remained to fight through the siege. He was one of those who made it through the woods to safety in Tuzla.

Begzada is one of only twenty Muslim students in the Srebrenica secondary school. The other 610 are all Serb. The disparity in teachers is even more striking. Only one of the 55 teachers – Dula's wife – is a Muslim. The corridors are lined with Christian paintings, and the curriculum is Serb.

This is so intimidating to Muslims that one wonders how the Japanese government had the nerve to put up the money for the rehabilitation of the school. It also raises a question: why, if the international community is serious about ethnic reintegration in Srebrenica, does it impose a multiethnic government on the place, but leave the schools to propagate Serb values and culture?

As we get to know her better, our young translator Begzada confesses that she "hates Serbs." We press her on this and she becomes confused. She says that her Serb classmates are friendly in school and that she doesn't hate them "as people," but that she hates the "idea" of Serbs and what they have done.



Home again: Begzada Halilovic, 17 (left) and Pia Schneider from AP

This sort of abstract hatred exists on all sides in Bosnia. The real question is whether it will be given a chance to re-emerge in the sort of bloodletting that led to the Srebrenica massacre.

The Bosnian war does not – as some writers maintain - tell us that Bosnians like Begzada and her classmates are doomed to repeat their history, and that "ethnic hatred" is built into their DNA. But it does teach us that the most ethnically-integrated communities - like Srebrenica - can be torn apart by calculated policies of racism, unscrupulous politicians, international cowardice, economic pressures, dehumanizing propaganda, and a few select acts of cruelty. These were the forces that converged in 1991-1992. It will require hard work and constant vigilance, particularly from the international community, to ensure that they do

not recur.

Pia leaves Srebrenica convinced that another war is inevitable. I think that working at Bosfam may change her mind. Bosfam was the first agency that brought Serb and Muslim women together in Srebrenica to knit sweaters for children. All of the knitters had been uprooted and all

no doubt felt the same abstract hatred as Begzada. But they also found that they had other things in common, as women, mothers and wives.

They, however, are older women. The real challenge lies with the next generation. Begzada avoids socializing with Serb girls or boys in Srebrenica and she cannot wait to spend next weekend in Tuzla with her boyfriend. Once she finishes school she wants to leave Srebrenica.

Who can blame her? Right now there is nothing here to hold her, except her family. Yet without the vitality of youth, the embers of reconstruction, already barely aglow, will be completely extinguished.

8. Housing Lottery

Srebrenica, June 10: A small group of experienced Bosfam weavers have now returned to Srebrenica. Bosfam's hope is that these veterans can continue to produce kilims, train other weavers, and persuade more exiled widows that they can in fact earn a living back home in Srebrenica.

First they will need somewhere to live. Over the past three years, the international administration of Bosnia has rigorously enforced property laws and expelled displaced people and squatters



from homes they do not own. This is one of the great success stories of the Bosnian peace agreement. Of course it has created a new problem of displacement for those kicked out, but at least it frees up houses for their original owners. Nowhere is this more important than Srebrenica.

Left: Hoping to settle down - Hajra Dodic

The problem is that while houses may be coming vacant, most need to be repaired or rebuilt before they can become habitable. This task has been undertaken by a group of international NGOs using bilateral funds from governments.

Pia and I do not have time to visit all these agencies in Srebrenica, but we are left with two strong impressions: First, hundreds of homes have indeed been rebuilt. The German NGO THW alone has rebuilt 350 (60% for Muslim returnees, the remaining 40% for displaced Serbs). Second, hundreds more – perhaps thousands - still need repair, and the aid money is drying up fast. The UN expects no more than 140 new houses to be completed this year. THW expects to complete 70 and then close down.

Who will strike it lucky in this lottery? This is unclear. Under the system, returnees register with a commission, which then makes recommendations to the Mayor. The process is monitored by the international agencies from Bratunac to guard against favoritism, but the donors are desperate to turn over responsibility to the local authorities, so it presumably does not hurt to know the Mayor. It also seems likely that agencies will give preference to the homes of large families, as

opposed to single widows, and also choose houses which are close to town and in need of least repair.

There will be many disappointed people when the agencies finally pull out, and they may well include Hajra Djozic, an active Bosfam member who was widowed in 1985 and expelled to Tuzla after the massacre. Two years ago, Hajra was asked to pay rent in the house where she was living in Tuzla. This gave her no option but to return to Srebrenica. Unfortunately, her own home was reduced to ashes during the war, so she and her daughter moved into the home of a friend who had left for Australia.

Hajra could play an important role in any Bosfam weaving project in Srebrenica. Bosfam has loaned her a large loom, and she has already completed a magnificent kilim that is waiting in the Tuzla storehouse for a buyer. Bosfam paid Hajra 150 Euros (\$170) for the kilim which she spent on a television, but she complains bitterly at being paid so little for two months work. Given that her kilim remains unsold, and that the Bosfam staff in Tuzla are working without salaries, \$170 seems generous enough. But Hajra doesn't see it that way.

Perhaps we catch Hajra on a bad day, but she makes us feel unwelcome. After the camaraderie of Bosfam's office in Tuzla, this is a surprise. Eventually, and with bad grace, Hajra allows us to film her weaving, and her fingers fly in and out of the warp and the woof with wondrous dexterity. The patterns emerge, as if from nowhere. Hajra has been doing this since she was a girl, and like many of the weavers, she is a living repository of a precious culture. But her heart is not in it. She makes weaving seem like an unwelcome chore. The contrast with Tuzla could not be greater. For the Bosfam weavers in Tuzla, working at the loom is more than a therapy. It is an obsession.

Hajra is clearly worried that she will be left without a home when the donors leave Srebrenica, and this may account for her mood. But her predicament shows how much is at stake here. If weaving can be reintroduced in Srebrenica, it will not only bring in money for widows like Hajra, but preserve an ancient family tradition and part of Srebrenica's pre-war culture.

Judging from Hajra's disposition, some very important threads need to be drawn together for this to happen, and they are definitely not made of wool. The weavers will need homes. They will need companionship and support from other weavers. They will need a loom and material. And they will need to make a living. Otherwise Bosfam's vision will remain precisely that – a vision.

#9. Joined at the Hip

Srebrenica, June 10: Our confidence in Bosfam's chances of establishing a foothold in Srebrenica has been shaken by Hajra's moodiness. By the end of the day, confidence is restored. Three remarkable women have convinced us that it might well be possible.

The first is Milica Janic, a Bosnian Serb who runs Bosfam's office in Srebrenica. Milica and her family fled from the town in 1992 when it became a Muslim enclave. (Only one old lady, now in her late nineties, is said to have remained throughout). They returned after the 1995 massacre to

a dead town. Several thousand displaced Serbs had been brought in from other war-ravaged Serb communities, but very much against their will.

Srebrenica might have been key to General Mladic's mad dream of a Muslim-free Eastern Bosnia, but it was the last place on earth that his own Serb people wanted to live. For those Serbs who had lived here in harmony with Muslims prior to the war, like Milica's family, it must have been like returning to a graveyard.

We would need more time to broach such delicate issues with Milica. But most writers have all but ignored the plight of Srebrenica's Serbs. The honorable exception is our former AP colleague Peter Lippman, who has written much of AP's material about Srebrenica. Peter always insisted that Srebrenica's displaced Serbs should be viewed as victims.

Beba Hadzic, from Bosfam, sees Milica as a person of rare courage. When the first Muslims began to trickle back into Srebrenica, Milica was willing to help Beba organize a large knitting project, financed by the Canadians, that brought Serb and Muslim women together to make 500 sweaters for children in the primary school. It was the first attempt at ethnic reconciliation in the town, and it was not popular with many of the town's hard-line Serb nationalist leaders. But Milica is proud of the project. Each of the women received 10 marks (\$4). It is all neatly recorded.



Photo left: Milica Janic runs Bosfam's Srebrenica office

Today, Milica's task is to help us visit Esma Divovic and Esma's close friend, Kadira Smajic, who both live some way out of Srebrenica. Both were active Bosfam members in Tuzla and Esma's skills at the loom are legendary. She would be a prime candidate for any weaving venture here in Srebrenica. But her own house is not yet fit to live in, so we arrange to meet her in the house of Kadira.

It quickly becomes clear, in Pia's words, that Esma and Kadira are "joined at the hip," and the sight of these two women together quickly restores our spirits. One moment they are giggling like teenagers, the next they are discussing momentous events with furrowed brows. They were bussed out of Potocari together during those hellish days in July 1995, and were inseparable during exile in Tuzla. When Kadira's house in Srebrenica was refurbished, she immediately asked Esma to come back and sleep at her place until Esma's own house was fit to live in.

We spend some time establishing who is who and where we are, to the amusement of three of Kadira's children - two boys and a girl, all in their twenties. It then begins to dawn on me why these two women are special. Neither lost any close relatives in the massacre. Esma's husband died before the war and her only son is one of the few Muslims serving in the Srebrenica police

force. Kadira's husband also survived the massacre, as did her oldest son, who must have been very close to the age of fifteen back on July 11, 1995. A few months older and he would have been taken off to certain death.

Kadira has six children in all. I don't know if there is another Muslim family with two living parents and six children in Srebrenica, but it is a wonderful relief to find a house that is bustling with life. Kadira's oldest son is working at the Potocari memorial. Her daughter is several years older than our translator Begzada, but they can both agree that there is not much for young people in the town.



Buddies for life: Esma Divovic (left) and Kadira Smajic returned to live in Srebrenica

Esma and Kadira take us off to see Esma's own house, which occupies a glorious position overlooking the valley but is missing floorboards, tiles, and pretty much everything else – although it does seem structurally sound. Esma spends her days here, caring to her vegetables and doing what she can to clean up. She's managed to make one room habitable, with a cot and a stove. All she needs now is

some material, and she'd be able to move back in. Many families complain that some NGOs just dump wood and plaster on their doorstep and then leave widows to do the repairs - or pay workers. I imagine that Esma would be able to count on Kadira's strong young family to help if and when she can obtain the materials.

Esma would love to resume weaving, and one could easily see her schooling Kadira in her own personal patterns at a loom together. With Milica managing the office in town, and Magbula and Hajra also weaving again, there is clearly the nucleus of a weaving project here in Srebrenica.

But I'm not thinking projects as we leave the sunny little patch of hillside. I'm thinking of the way Esma showed us round her little square house, once so trim and now so shabby. I'm thinking of the way she peeled a bit of paint off here and picked at a loose wire there - but with a grin rather than a grimace.

I can't help but feel that this is a woman who knows how to count her blessings. With a living son, a life-long friend within calling distance, her own soil to touch, and no brutal nightmares of a murdered husband to contend with, Esma is rich beyond the dreams of most Muslims from Srebrenica.

She seems to know it. Perhaps this is why Pia and I catch ourselves smiling whenever Esma's name comes up during the rest of our trip.

#10. Salt Peter

Tuzla, June 11: We return to Tuzla by bus and meet up in the afternoon with our friend Peter Lippman, from Seattle, who is at the end of a long visit to the country he knows so well.



Left: Peter Lippman reported from Bosnia for AP between 1999 and 2004

Peter left the Advocacy Project last year after writing several of our best series (on Guatemala, Ecuador, Bosnia). He is now researching a book about Bosnia since the war, and knowing Peter's style it will be full of dry wit and elegiac prose. One of his most memorable diary items was about a couple in besieged Sarajevo who covered their bed with cats to keep warm at night.

Right now Peter is obsessed by salt. If Srebrenica is known for its silver, then Tuzla is known for its salt. Peter tells us that the people of Tuzla have been flooding the land under Tuzla for centuries, drawing up the water and extracting the salt. The result is that parts of the town are subsiding, and some ancient landmarks have disappeared altogether. Salt has even entered the vernacular. Instead of telling a Tuzlan to "get real," you say "put some salt in your mind." (Strangely enough, on the other side of the hills, Srebrenica has historically suffered from such a lack of salt that Srebrenicans have been called "goiters.")

Peter is one of those rare types who can go anywhere, sleep anywhere and put up with any amount of hardship to get the job done. He is also deeply respectful of community-based activists who work hard at bettering the lives of others. His devotion to Bosnians, and the fact that he speaks the language fluently, has earned him legions of friends on both sides of the Muslim-Serb divide. But Peter also harbors no illusions. When Pia and I lament the lack of cooperation between NGOs he observes wryly that "mistrust is the default mode here in Bosnia."

Behind this is a serious point about civil society. Peter is convinced that each NGO is out for what it can get, as well as totally dependent on donor aid, and that this makes any effective networking by civil society highly improbable. This is in spite of the fact that Peter spent several months of 2003 on behalf of the Advocacy Project, helping the Forum of Srebrenica NGOs (an 18-member network) to design a new website.

Peter went to great pains to persuade the Forum to elect an editorial committee of three persons and produce material for the site. But in the end, he had to write and translate most of the material. This confirmed his suspicions that the Forum lacked drive and commitment.

The Forum has yet to mount any collective action, which is the true test of a vigorous civil society. Notwithstanding this, one of our former AP associates, Aspen Brinton, visited the Forum last summer and concluded that the discipline of working on the website and writing a common mission statement had, in fact, helped to bring cohesion to the Forum. The reason was that its Serb members wanted to emphasize reconciliation, while Muslim members wanted those responsible for the massacre to be held accountable. In the end they reached consensus. Aspen concluded that this in itself was a contribution towards ethnic integration.

Peter agrees that it sounds good, but his own personal default mode tonight is cynicism and he



still doubts whether the Forum can be effective. The Forum received some bad news earlier this week, when the local council retracted an earlier offer to give it a battered old building in the town center, provided that the Forum could find the money for refurbishment. Apparently a Sarajevo-based group of war veterans has come up with the money.

Zulfo Halilovic survived the massacre in 1995. He now works for reconciliation as head of DRINA.

Around seven, as Tuzla comes alive and the main street turns into a teenage fashion catwalk, we meet for coffee with Zulfo Halilovic, one of the leaders of the Srebrenica Forum. Zulfo heads DRINA, which is one of the most effective NGOs working in Srebrenica. He is also another survivor of the 1995 massacre. According to Peter, Zulfo was on patrol in the hills outside Srebrenica in early July, 1995 when he saw the defenses of the town crumble in the valley below. It took him thirty days to reach Tuzla.

Now Zulfo is working to rebuild his tormented town. He was one of the very first to return and rebuild the village of Sucasca, in 2000. We saw him just yesterday in the Srebrenica park, officiating over a DRINA event for children – most of them Serb.

Zulfo concedes that the Forum of NGOs needs an injection of energy if it is to be useful, but he insists that NGOs have to pool their resources instead of competing. His own organization DRINA has just acquired its own new building, and Zulfo says that part of it could be used by the Forum. First, though, member organizations have to demonstrate some real commitment or leave the Forum. A meeting is planned for later in the month.

We hope it succeeds. As donors hand over the task of rebuilding Srebrenica to the local government, an active civil society will be more important than ever. Meanwhile I have a new nickname for our friend Peter. “Salt Peter” seems to suit his dry sense of humor, and he certainly has salt in his mind.

#11. Tough Talk Between Partners

Tuzla, June 12. Before I leave from Tuzla for the Netherlands, Pia, Beba Hadzic and I have a frank and useful discussion (as diplomats would say) about Pia’s work here and also about AP’s future relationship with Bosfam.

For me, it also helps to round off Beba the person. She’ll probably be glad to be rid of me. We’re both pretty stubborn, and occasionally one of us will start to bully the other. We both feel embarrassed when this happens, and revert to the convenient excuse that we are both professors and used to getting our way. Pia has observed such exchanges with some amusement. I’ve actually found it pretty hard work, given that I came here to reflect amidst the clear air and haunted valleys of Srebrenica.

Most visitors to AP's site will know how the Advocacy Project has tried to help Bosfam over the past year. AP bought about \$2,500 of Bosfam kilims (carpets) and showed them at three exhibitions in the US, where we also showed a film about Bosfam's members that was shot last summer by Aspen Brinton during her trip to Bosnia and edited by Ginger Bazar, another Georgetown student. The goal of these events was first and foremost to get Bosfam's message of hard work and reconciliation to an American public, and secondly, to raise some funds for Bosfam.

We're still sorting out the accounts, but it looks as though the entire project has generated about \$8,000 and sold about 45 Bosfam carpets, of which \$5,000 has returned to Bosfam. The rest has been taken up by expenses.

AP has put a vast amount of effort into this, and been chided repeatedly by our board and by members of our own group (including "Salt" Peter Lippman) for trying to sell carpets – something we plainly know nothing about. We're also in hot water with friends who have ordered carpets months ago and want to know why they haven't yet arrived.

The whole thing has tied our little project up in administrative knots and cost us a bundle. But we've loved every minute of the exhibitions, and seen people's eyes melt when they hear the Bosfam story. One group of Bosnian refugee women even visited our exhibition in Cambridge and went away determined to start weaving in the US! Also, it's helped AP to develop some close friendships with other advocacy groups like the Center for Balkan Development (formerly Friends of Bosnia). This has made it all worthwhile and taught us a great deal.

Still, now that we're here in Beba's office we want some answers. We want to know why it's taken Bosfam months to send on the carpets which we paid for immediately. We want to see their accounts. We want to know how much individual weavers receive for each carpet. We know that a lot of this information is inside the formidable mind of Beba Hadzic, and I would like to prize it out. Otherwise, I tell myself self-righteously, we cannot possibly continue this relationship. Damn it, we must have transparency!

I don't get a chance to open my mouth. It is clear that Beba is even more steamed than I am, and she's determined to get the first word in. There's no way that I'll succeed where the Bosnian Serbs have failed, so I listen quietly while Beba chides me for promising Bosfam much more money than we could deliver.

Ironically, she's angered by one of our most successful events. The Bosfam exhibition that we held in Washington was covered by the Voice of America's Bosnian television service. They spent almost two hours filming and the program was shown in Bosnia – including Srebrenica – the next day. We were hugely pleased, and the program apparently attracted a large audience in Bosnia. Beba sent us a lovely warm note, and I mentioned this to the Dutch government (which has funded AP) as a resounding success.

But now Beba is criticizing me for the publicity! Gradually, I begin to understand. After the program was aired, Beba received lots of inquiries from Bosfam members and clearly expected a windfall. Beba administers to a wide network of desperate women who depend on her, and she

probably made promises based on that advance publicity from Washington, that she will now find hard to keep. Unfortunately the event only generated about \$1,000 of clear “profit” for Bosfam (in addition to carpet sales and donations).



Photo left: Beba Hadzic defends Bosfam's interests

Beba does some rapid calculation, and decides that she's in trouble. Or at least I think she does. So instead of gushing with joy, she feels angry that she has somehow been kept in the dark, or misled. It does not help that the dollar has fallen by 25% against the Bosnian convertible mark over the past year. And she takes it out on us.

There's a precedent for this. Back on July 11, 1996 – the first anniversary of the massacre - Beba attended a mass meeting of Srebrenica widows in Tuzla alongside Queen Noor of Jordan, Ambassador Swanee Hunt (the US ambassador to Austria) and even Hebe de Bonafini, head of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo from Argentina. The

widows wept and screamed as they were shown film of their husbands being led away to their deaths, and the visiting dignitaries promised a massive aid package. Many months then passed before it became clear that the aid would be for all Bosnian women, and not just Srebrenica. The \$10-million “Bosnian Women's Initiative” has produced a lot of good projects, but at the time it seemed like a broken promise to these broken women of Srebrenica. Now Beba feels let down by us.

But Beba also hears directly from me, for the first time, about the hard work that our young staff at AP have put into Bosfam. She learns that our own project has been enriched in spirit but not in dollars, and that we ourselves are short of money. She starts to soften. Still, she needs an outlet for her frustration, and she asks why there hasn't been better communication between AP and Bosfam. “Hallo?” I feel like asking. “We haven't exactly heard much from you!”

I'm on the defensive throughout this exchange. Part of me resents this deeply, because we feel that we're Bosfam's best friend outside of Bosnia. I (or rather my back) can still remember carrying heavy carpets across Europe and back to the United States.

But the other part of me knows that Beba is right, and that in a true partnership you have to lay everything out in the open. We were so busy promoting the carpets that we did not keep Bosfam informed. Yet we make much of the fact that we develop “real” partnerships with groups like Bosfam, and that we don't impose our agenda and then disappear like “normal” aid donors. Now we've been found wanting.

So I accept the rebuke. At the same time, I start making a mental list of the information that we'll need from Bosfam about its business practices, book-keeping, etc. This partnership stuff cuts both ways!

It's been an illuminating exchange. It also helps to clarify our future strategy. Bosfam's first goal will be to standardize and improve production of its carpets. This will mean reducing the number of lines (which are all named after individual weavers) and looking hard at the quality. It will also mean supporting some sort of project for the Bosfam weavers who have returned to Srebrenica, like Esma, Magbula and Hajra. Their carpets will be sold through the main office in Tuzla.

The second goal will focus on marketing. AP will sell no more Bosfam carpets in the US. We'll hold events for Bosfam, exhibit Bosfam's carpets and tell Bosfam's inspiring story. But any sales will be done via the Bosfam website. Pia's job in the next few weeks will be to adapt the website and find the markets. There will be one price for the carpet, and the breakdown will show clearly how much goes to the weaver and everyone else involved.

At least that's the plan. Pia goes off to write it up and she'll discuss it with Beba in the next few days. We'll be able to see how it goes from Pia's blogs.

#12. Strong Woman

Tuzla, June 12: I interview Beba before I leave, in the Bosfam weaving center. Our former AP colleague Aspen Brinton caught Beba in a foul mood when she recorded an interview last year around July 11 for a promotional film on Bosfam. Beba explains to me that she had been tense at the time, because the July 11 anniversary of the massacre was approaching. Today she seems relaxed.

I want to capture something of Beba's personality in this interview. On the one hand, she can be impetuous, domineering, impatient. We've come up with three suggestions for possible Bosfam partners and she's dismissed them out of hand ("useless," "hopeless" "out of the question" etc). She refuses to join the Forum of Srebrenica NGOs, which we're trying to encourage. She has a talent for raising hackles, and this is not helpful. Inside her organization, Beba finds it hard to delegate. This also makes it hard for Bosfam to develop democratic rules and a real structure.



Beba Hadzic (left) with AP intern Pia Schneider in 2004

I think Beba must realize that Bosfam's utter dependency on her is not good. Last year, Aspen, Marta (our intern) and Peter found Beba veering between despair and optimism. Right now she seems much more inclined towards

optimism, even though the money is not coming in.

But what a remarkable woman she is. At one stage of the interview, I ask her if she considers herself “courageous.” To me, Beba and the other Srebrenica survivors personify courage. But she looks puzzled and asks what the word means. I try again. “Are you brave?” This produces the same reaction – complete bewilderment.

“Are you strong?” I ask. Now that she understands. She herself is so strong that I expect her to talk about herself. But her answer, roughly translated, is a surprise: “I consider that every woman - Serb, Muslim, Croat – who survived this war and now works to rebuild Bosnia, is strong. Every woman who brings up a child, who supports an unemployed husband, who has responsibility for a family of five people – that’s strength. That’s bigger than Bosfam.”

My heart goes out to Beba. I remind myself that we must talk to her more often and more directly. Partnership is indeed a two-way thing, and we have much to learn from Bosfam and its director.

#13. In Search of the Dead

Tuzla, June: Earlier in the week, before we went to Srebrenica, Pia and I visited the Tuzla field center of the International Commission on Missing Persons (ICMP), which is trying to identify the remains of several thousand victims of the Srebrenica massacre. The work is both a straightforward scientific task and a probe into the deepest fears of the women we are coming to know as friends. It is not easy to write about. I have decided to leave the task of deciphering my jumbled notes and impressions to the end, in the hope that these last few days will give me some perspective.

The ICMP was set up after the 1996 G-7 meeting, at the urging of former US President Bill Clinton and now works throughout the former Yugoslavia. The Srebrenica cases are dealt with at the regional branch here in Tuzla and by the time of our visit, 1,360 victims from the massacre have been identified. 960 have been reburied in the mass cemetery near Potocari and another 271 are being prepared for reburial this coming July 11. The remaining 129 have been buried in family plots.

This work is completely separate from the exhumations of mass graves and the collection of evidence for the prosecution of war criminals. Hundreds of mass graves have been discovered throughout the region since the wars in Yugoslavia began in June 1991, and many have been visited by investigators from the International Criminal Tribunal in the Hague as well as local (regional and national) judicial bodies.

But prosecution and identification have very different goals. The first seeks proof of a crime, and the evidence may be obtained without even exhuming all of the bodies from a mass grave, let alone identifying them. In contrast, the task of collecting body parts and other evidence for purposes of identification can never be complete until the last fragment has been collected. Everything counts. Even a random photo can help to confirm the identity of a soldier (and maybe even give his mother the consolation of knowing that he was carrying her photo when he died.)

The nature and scale of the Srebrenica massacre make the identifications incredibly difficult. The bodies of many of those who died in the forests were ripped apart by animals, or scattered over a huge area, while massacre victims were dug up by the Bosnian Serbs from the killing fields and reburied in far-off “secondary graves.” (The Serbs knew that the world was onto them almost immediately. US satellites recorded images of mass graves, and showed evidence of their disturbance, within days of the event.)



Photo left: These personal belongings were found in the woods above Srebrenica

The Hague tribunal has confirmed the existence of 43 mass graves from the Srebrenica killings. New graves came to light recently after the government of the Bosnian Serb Republic finally published a report, under fierce pressure from the international administrator (“High Representative”) in Sarajevo. The report identified 32 graves, of which several were previously unknown to the tribunal. They will

supposedly be investigated jointly by the two Bosnian “entities” (Serb Republic and Federation). How much actually gets done will depend on how far the Serb authorities are prepared to cooperate.

Overall, the Bosnian Serbs have done all in their power to obstruct the identifications. When they dug up the graves and reburied the remains, bodies were torn apart and human remains were (in the scientific jargon) “commingled.” In plain language, this means that many parts of a victim’s body - arms, skull, legs, feet, even a finger - could all end up in different graves that are now many miles apart and in hostile territory. This gives some indication of the task that still faces the ICMP. It also explains why experts expect the identifications to take many more years, and test the resolve of the international community.

But until the puzzle is solved and the cases are closed, there will be no recovery for the survivors. This is one of the immutable facts of Srebrenica. Until they have been able to consign their murdered relative to a grave and been able to mourn, the women of Srebrenica will be suspended in the same sort of limbo that faces all relatives of the disappeared. I have seen their anguish reflected on faces in many different countries, from Argentina to Cambodia.

I have also written before about one Srebrenica widow who has repeated nightmares of her 15 year-old son being grabbed by a Serb soldier with a long, curved butchering knife. Will she rest more easily when she has seen him buried - knowing that she can, at least, visit his remains in Potocari? That is her hope and assumption. At the same time, she dreads confirmation that their son will never come back.

This may be hard to understand for those of us who have not personally suffered such an experience. But it will strike a chord with relatives of the 9/11 outrage - and anyone else who has

seen a loved one snatched from them by violence and hurled into oblivion. They need to know the truth, but at the same time they fear it.

#14. The DNA Puzzle



Tuzla, June: The ICMP center is situated at the Tuzla city morgue, which beckons us with a sweetish odor that is barely discernible as we start to climb the street. By the time we arrive, it has become a stench that seems to cling to our clothes and assault our senses.

Left: Among the body bags - Zlatan Sabanovic from the ICMP

The ICMP center is a squat, functional building of offices and forensic laboratories. It also houses a massive freezer with 3,500 body bags of human remains. One of the laboratories contains a huge boiler which removes any remaining flesh from bones. Zlatan Sabanovic, the ICMP program manager, explains that bones yield up the all-important secrets through DNA tests, and that flesh (which he says “resembles soap”) is no longer “useful.” Given that even this “soap” was once part of a human being, I wonder whether it doesn’t deserve more reverential treatment. (Incidentally, the existence of flesh indicates that a body was buried in thick wet soil and was not exposed to air, which would have caused it to decompose.)

The ICMP is trying to solve a giant scientific puzzle. The goal, in Zlatan’s words, is to provide “99.99% confirmation” for the surviving relatives. This is done by collecting DNA samples from all relatives of those who died and comparing the results with DNA tests from these remains. Any traditional forensic material, in the form of clothing and other personal belongings, help to firm up a successful match.

Before DNA became available in 2001, the Commission was entirely dependent on the forensic material, which was meticulously photographed and inspected by relatives. But this produced very few matches, because with the exception of documents and photos, very few personal belongings were demonstrably unique. Only seven victims were identified in 1997. Four years later, in 2001, the figure had barely risen, to 52.

Some of the belongings are on view here, and both Pia and I find them deeply disturbing. They remind me of the prison of Tuol Sileng in Cambodia, which I visited in 1980, shortly after the Vietnamese liberated the country. The Khmer Rouge took photos of prisoners at Tuol Sileng before they were tortured to death. During that same trip I watched the killing fields being dug up in Cambodia. In a way the photos of Tuol Sileng had more of an impact because they showed real people, with fear in their eyes. It was harder to picture the remains as human beings. At least that is how I recall it from a distance. Perhaps I will feel different after today.

Here in Tuzla we look at photos, clocks, shoes, letters, a pair of glasses, and even a hand-written selection from the Koran. I also carry small personal mementos (photos and a small bible) whenever I travel. I find the glasses particularly poignant. Is this because I'm always misplacing my own reading glasses? Or am I thinking of those deeply disturbing images from the Holocaust - of shoes, human hair, gold from teeth, suitcases, and glasses - which had more value to the killers than people? This center forces you to ask such questions.

The number of identifications shot up from 51 in 2001 to 518 in 2002, when the ICMP started DNA testing. (The ICMP has DNA facilities in Banja Luka, Belgrade, Sarajevo and Tuzla). But identifications fell again to 490 in 2003, as the ICMP scientists began to run out of whole skeletons and had to work more with body parts.

Zlatan Sabanovic expects this trend to continue. As of March 31, 1,042 cases had been definitively resolved through DNA. But a frustratingly large number - 849 - are still under investigation, and proving more difficult by the day.

The reason, again, lies in the nature of the Srebrenica massacre. DNA testing is easiest when the victim's parents are both alive and can provide samples. That provides a 100% match. But many of the victims were fathers - which instantly cuts the odds that their own murdered sons can be identified. In principle, old men were allowed to leave, and their survival has made it easier to identify their sons who were killed. But in many cases, all of the male members of entire families were killed.

At this point, the puzzle spins off in many different directions. The victims were overwhelmingly male, but a wife's DNA cannot identify a dead husband, and a living daughter cannot identify a dead father. A sister cannot identify a dead brother. The further away one gets from the central relationship of both parents to the child, the more collaborative evidence is required. Even the identification of a leg is not enough to confirm a death, because the person might have lost a leg and survived. If two twins were killed, and both parents survived, their DNA alone will not tell which twin was which.



About a boy: The remains of one of Srebrenica's teenage victims

The science is so fascinating and difficult that I begin to understand how it allows for darker thoughts to be put to one side, although this must be harder for Zlatan, a Bosniak (Bosnian Muslim), than for his foreign colleagues. In one room, we find a Canadian forensic scientist making sense of a jumble of bones, which lie scattered on a steel table like the pieces of a jigsaw. I can identify a skull, which is almost complete, but little else. She, however, moves

tiny bones around with brisk confidence, and within minutes a skeleton emerges in front of our eyes. She tells us that this was once a teenage boy.

Does such work affect her? Not really, she says. If it did, she probably could not do her job. I imagine that anyone who deals with the dead would say the same, but right now my own imagination is going at top speed and this pile of bones is suddenly very human. It has become a terrified boy early in July 1995. Perhaps he is in the woods above Srebrenica, separated from his father. Perhaps he's been thrust into that rusty old farming cooperative in Kravica, staring at the steaming bodies and a Serb soldier with a smile on his face and a long curved knife in his hand.....

#15. On Trial

The Hague, Netherlands, June 17: Courtroom number 3 at the International Criminal Tribunal in the Hague is a modern, functional room, like the offices of the ICMP in Tuzla. Visitors sit in a gallery, which is arranged into three tiers for the press, "VIPs" and others.

The court operates behind a thick glass panel. The only concessions to the grandeur of law are the vivid red gowns of the three trial judges (who are from China, the Ukraine and Argentina) and the elegant white cravats and black robes of the two teams for the prosecution and defense. Four members of the registry (which administers the tribunal) sit ranged in front of the judges.

Earlier today, in another courtroom, the Tribunal witnessed the opening salvos by Slobodan Milosevic, the former President of Yugoslavia, in his own defense. Milosevic is certainly the most distinguished prisoner in the Hague but he has consistently denounced the legitimacy of the Tribunal, so the decision was taken to allow him to defend himself, in an effort to ensure his participation. He has seized the opportunity to mount a theatrical and histrionic defense, bullying judges, scoring political points, and mocking the entire process.

This morning, Milosevic opened his defense by demanding that hundreds of witnesses be called in his defense, including Bill Clinton, Tony Blair, Gerhard Schroeder and General Wesley Clark. Instead of going into contortions over this latest taunt, the judges cleverly reminded Milosevic that he had 150 days to lay out his defense. This leaves him with the daunting task of making his selection, and justifying it in writing.

Opinions are divided on whether the Tribunal's credibility has been reduced or enhanced by Milosevic's antics. Some feel he has turned the thing into a circus and gravely discredited the gravitas of the court. The previous president, a British judge, had to resign with a brain tumor, and there are some who say that the strain contributed to his illness.

But one Serbian I speak to (who hates Milosevic for what he has done to her country) insists that anything is permissible when a man is on trial for genocide. She also says that the personal strain on Milosevic (who has a weak heart) is extraordinary and she speaks of him almost reverently, as a "superman" for taking on his defense.

This is a woman who marched for his downfall in Belgrade. Her view is that we should not be diverted by Milosevic's theatrical performance, any more than we should be lulled by the red robes and legal mumbo jumbo. For all its mannerisms, a law court is a mirror of the real world.

People are fighting for their life here, just as they did on the hills above Srebrenica. It's just that the surroundings are so different. I'm not so sure.



Reversal of Fortune: A survivor from Srebrenica watches the trial of Slobodan Milosevic, taking place in The Hague

In courtroom 3, a trial chamber of three judges is hearing a motion by Vidoje Blagejovic, who was a senior commander in the Bosnian Serb Army that oversaw the Srebrenica massacre. Blagejovic has asked to give a statement, and this trial chamber is hearing his request. This is the reason for my presence. It will, I hope, round off my own short portrait of the Srebrenica tragedy.

In contrast to the Milosevic hearing this morning, which attracted a huge audience, I count two journalists, one Very Important Person, and four unimportant persons like myself. Two are related to people working at the tribunal. Whatever his role at Srebrenica, Blagejovic clearly does not attract much attention from the outside world, but I'm feeling quite keyed up at the prospect of seeing in person one of those who desecrated the valley I have just visited.

The bald facts about the Hague Tribunal are as follows: it was established in May 1993 by the UN Security Council, following the Serbs' first major assault on Srebrenica, as part of a political package that also established Srebrenica as one of several UN "safe areas." During its 11 years in operation, the Tribunal has indicted a total of 112 individuals in connection with the entire wars in the former Yugoslavia. 45 have been arrested, 50 are in custody and 25 are still loose. (The rest have been released, died, or had indictments dropped). The Tribunal has cost well over a billion dollars.

13 persons have been indicted in connection with Srebrenica, and six are still on the run. They include the High Priest of the Srebrenica blood-letting, the former head of the Bosnian Serb Army, General Ratko Mladic, and the Bosnian Serb civilian leader, Radovan Karadzic, who are both living in Serbia.

Also indicted but on the loose is Ljubisa Beara, who was head of the Bosnian Serb Army's security administration and played Adolf Eichman to Mladic's Hilter, organizing the logistics of the massacre. Several notable Serb paramilitary leaders, like Milan Lukic, a handsome psychopath from Visegrad who went on a murderous spree in Srebrenica in July 1995, have not yet even been publicly indicted by the Tribunal.

Of those in detention in connection with Srebrenica, only one, Nasir Oric, is a Muslim. Oric organized the Muslim defense of Srebrenica between 1992 and 1995, until he was withdrawn

shortly before the collapse. He is a hero to the Muslim survivors, but he is charged with overseeing atrocities against Serbs in the Srebrenica area in late 1992 and early 1993.

The Serbs who are in detention, like Blagejovic, are mainly senior army officers from the DRINA Corps of the Bosnian Serb Army, which operated in Eastern Bosnia and besieged Srebrenica. The DRINA Corps Commander, General Krstic, has already been sentenced by the Tribunal to genocide. Blagejovic himself commanded the Bratunac Brigade of the DRINA Corps and was directly under Krstic in the chain of command. The registrar has lumped Blagejovic's trial together with that of Dragan Jokic, who was chief engineer for the Zvornik Brigade and is charged with supervising the digging up of the graves, and the reburials.

As I take down the names and facts, I remind myself that accountability is – like the identification of victims - one of the keys to the reconstruction of the place I have just visited. They can rebuild Srebrenica's houses, exhume the graves, identify the victims and start their small businesses, but if those who were responsible for the massacre are not brought to justice it will all be for nought. The abstract hatred that we discussed earlier could yet again find a specific target. There is much at stake in Courtroom 3.

#16. The Banality of Law

The Hague, June 17: Hannah Arendt wrote of the banality of evil after observing the trial of Adolf Eichman. As I watch Blagejovic in courtroom 3 at the Hague Tribunal, I'm struck by the banality of law.

Blagejovic enters in the presence of two burly, but unarmed, UN guards, one of whom sits next to him. Like all of the DRINA Corps senior officers, he was a career officer in the Yugoslav National Army before the war. Today, he's dressed in a plain dark blue suit, with a blue shirt and a black tie. He has a moustache, and he speaks with a raspy, confident voice. The television cameras catch him from above and show thin wisps of hair that have been carefully combed across a balding head.



Behind bars: Radislav Krstic, commander of the DRINA Corps of the Bosnian Serb Army, oversaw the Srebrenica massacre. He has been sentenced by the Hague tribunal to 35 years in jail.

Blagejovic looks ordinary in civilian clothes, but it also doesn't take much to imagine him in uniform. It's hard to tell whether he would have been more comfortable giving or taking orders. I'm looking for some distinguishing feature, but Blagejovic does not cooperate. At least not at once.

This case may lack the theater of the Milosevic trial, but it has its own bizarre aspects. Blagejovic was arrested by NATO troops on August 10, 2001, but for the last year he's refused to speak to his lawyer, an American named Michael Carnavas. A year ago, Carnavas startled everyone by announcing that Blagejovic had tried to bribe him by demanding some of

Carnavas's hefty defense budget in return for cooperating. Carnavas denounced it immediately and earned Blagejovic's undying hostility.

Carnavas was appointed by the Tribunal registrar, and it's a mystery why he hasn't been replaced, given that he never speaks to his client. Carnavas has done his best to mount a defense, and called witnesses. His argument is that Blagejovic (who was appointed shortly before the massacre) could not have known of the killings, which were being orchestrated by special forces from outside the DRINA Corps and paramilitaries like Milan Lukic, been drafted in from other regions.

Carnavas himself is not popular around here. People say he throws his arms about, abuses the prosecution and acts like everyone's worst stereotype of an American attorney. But today he looks subdued. Perhaps it's because he is being quietly and effectively rebuked by the chief prosecuting attorney, Peter McLoskey for giving two interviews to the Serbian press. McLoskey (the son of the late US Congressman) refers with regret to the articles ("although of course we take the media with a grain of salt"). Having talked to his "distinguished colleague," McLoskey is able to assure the judges that there will be no more such "unfortunate" leaks.

Blagejovic wants to tell his side of the story, and he'd better get moving because his trial is due to wind up by July 30. The purpose of this hearing is to consider the request. Judge Liu Daqun, from China, warns Blagejovic that if he testifies under oath, he could well incriminate himself, but that if he just gives a "solemn statement" which is not subject to cross-examination, it won't carry the same weight. Given this, intones Lui, the court recommends that Blagejovic had better talk to his lawyer.

Suddenly Blagejovic comes alive. He bristles with anger: "Whatever you do, don't force me to meet with Carnavas. I don't want to meet with him, ever!" Lawyer Carnavas is not having a good day. First he gets a public dressing-down for speaking to the press, now his client is giving him the cold shoulder.

Judge Liu looks impassive, and announces a recess. People pick up papers and start looking forward to the weekend. Blagejovic is escorted out by UN guards. Soon he'll be back in the Tribunal detention center in Scheveningen, near the sea, where rumor has it he and the other Serbs happily consort with the Muslim and Croat detainees.

I struggle to make a connection between what I've just seen and the massacre at Srebrenica. It's certainly harder than it was at the ICMP identification center in Tuzla. Seeing Blagejovic behind a glass panel certainly doesn't have the same impact as the skeleton of one of his 15 year-old victims.

But the real contrast lies in this strange legal proceeding. It has moved at half speed, in disconnected exchanges. Judge Lui's ponderous and awkward English slowed it down further. "Imust ... remind you that under article 84 bis....." Nothing could be further from the swift downward slash of the knife, the hammering guns, the speed with which life was snuffed out in the July 1995 massacre.

The Tribunal's process may be ponderous, but it has been accepted universally and will admit to no deviations. This is what gives it credibility, and the right to pass judgment on acts of total deviance, like Srebrenica. I also appreciate the irony of a judge from Communist China gently reminding this Serb butcher, who helped to kill over 7,000 humans without a thought for their rights, that he has a right not to incriminate himself.

But none of the widows from Srebrenica are present to relish the irony. Even if they were, they would surely find it hard to understand why the real concern is that Blagejovic won't get a fair trial because he refuses to talk to his lawyer. That is hardly the sort of justice that will soften the edges of their anger and pain.

#17. The Verdict

The Hague, June 17: The International Criminal Tribunal will start winding down at the end of the year. At the insistence of the UN Security Council it will cease investigations after December 31, 2004. So the reckoning has already begun. What has it achieved?

Vidoje Blagejovic, the former commander of the Bratunac Brigade in the Bosnian Serb Army, may well be found guilty of genocide, like his former commander Krstic. If so, it will help to render history's verdict on Srebrenica. Until this Tribunal began to hear cases, "genocide" was a concept not a crime. The Tribunal has reaffirmed the importance of individual criminal liability, and made it very difficult for people like Blagejovic to argue that they were acting under orders.

All this is important, but it is offset by the massive failure to arrest Mladic and Karadzic. This has fatally damaged the Tribunal's credibility, precisely because the Tribunal has chosen to focus on those, like Blagejovic, who gave the orders. Without Mladic behind bars, that strategy is in tatters.

But the greatest failure has been one of connection. Process is fine up to a point, but at some stage the accused and the accuser have to look each other in the eye. This has not happened at the Hague Tribunal. The victims have not – with some individual exceptions - come to the Tribunal, and the tribunal has not gone to them.



On the eve of the massacre: Ratko Mladic (left), the Bosnian Serb Army Commander, shares a toast with Colonel Ton Karremans, commander of the Dutch UN peacekeepers

The Tribunal has signally failed to trigger a process of national trials and public debate in the Serb Republic. Not a single individual indicted by the Tribunal has been arrested by the Bosnian Serb authorities. True, Milosevic's trial been followed intensely in the Serbia, but many feel this has backfired and reinforced the Serbs' historic sense of self-pity.

Actually, there will be a human connection here in the Tribunal next week, but it will be between the Dutch people and their own ghastly memories of Srebrenica. Retired Colonel Ton Karremans, the Dutch commander of the UN battalion that was given the task of making Srebrenica a “safe area,” will testify on behalf of Blagejovic in this court room.

Given their commitment to justice and peace, it is one of the saddest ironies that the Dutch have been crucified for allowing the Srebrenica massacre to occur. The Dutch rationalize it repeatedly: “Once Srebrenica’s defenses fell on July 11, 1995; once the Serbs had tasted blood; once the UN had failed to provide military back-up; once the dam had broken – well, Karremans and his tiny contingent were powerless to intervene.”

Or were they? My Dutch friends still ask themselves that question. It is like a national wound that will not heal, and it will again be opened next week in this bland court room when Karremans is called back from his self-imposed exile in Spain. His task? Ironically, to speak on behalf of a former Bosnian Serb general, charged with supervising the massacre.

Meanwhile, back in Srebrenica, the widows will be steeling themselves for the next mass burial at the massacre site on July 11. They will be all but oblivious to the fact that the wheels of international justice are moving - slowly and strangely - on their behalf up here in The Hague.