



**On the Record: Returning Refugees to Bosnia**

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**Kozarac Conference Winds Up  
Kozarac Meeting Ends with Call to Arrest War Criminals, Develop Peace Center in Kozarac**

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**From the AP Editorial Desk**

**Kozarac Meeting Ends with Call to Arrest War Criminals, Develop Peace Center in Kozarac**

Thursday, May 27. The sixth annual conference of Srcem do Mira ended today with a call for the prosecution of war criminals and the unconditional return of all Bosnian refugees to the homes. The international community is urged to remain in Bosnia as long as it takes to achieve these important goals.

The conference attendants also decided to create an "international house of peace" in Kozarac, where the meeting has taken place, and establish a reconstruction fund for Kozarac that would fund scholarships and generally promote refugee returns.

Next year's meeting -- the seventh -- will also take place in Kozarac. It is hoped that the meeting will become an annual event.

Four days of discussion have produced over 20 specific recommendations. These will now be sent to the offices of the OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe) in both Bosnian entities, the office of the High Representative, and the governments of the two entities and the Bosnian federation.

None of these bodies, except the OSCE, attended the conference, and it is far from clear whether

they will show any interest. Even more serious, no representatives of Serb NGOs attended this week's meeting. This, however, does not appear to diminish its success in the eyes of participants. In addition to Bosnians, they included friends from Croatia, England, Germany, Denmark, France, Sweden, USA, Canada, and Scotland.

The conference resolutions identify some of the obstacles that need to be lifted before refugees can return. These include the sale of private land by municipal authorities to displaced persons who are living in an entity or municipality other than their own; highly complicated administrative procedures in both entities; and resistance from nationalist politicians.

All of these, says the communiqué, "directly work towards changing the ethnic makeup of Bosnia and Herzegovina."

The resolutions also recommend that peace education be taught at schools, and that this should include instruction in civil society and democracy. School curricula throughout Bosnia should be standardized.

Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) are seen as a crucial element in promoting return, and the conference resolutions called for Srce do Mira to be expanded beyond northwest Bosnia:

"We pledge to continue to work on the strengthening of the network of NGOs in both entities. We call for the inclusion of citizens and the NGO sector in the creation of the new electoral laws. We will struggle for the participation of NGOs in the creation of social policy from the local to the state level. We call on the international community to press for the greater inclusion of women in the taking of decisions regarding return, as well as in peace negotiations."

The conference attendants were not able to ignore the tragedy of Kosovo. "The international community must work towards the return of Kosovar refugees to their homes, so as to avoid the painful, drawn out process of return that is now taking place in Bosnia and Herzegovina."

### **From Manisha's diary: "India! India!"**

Thursday, May 27. Being of Indian heritage, I was the only non-white person at the conference. I found myself comparing the conditions in Kozarac to those in India.

India is a complete assault on all the senses. Bosnia is hardly that. In Kozarac there are no overwhelming odors, and no throngs of people. Your car doesn't veer in the road to avoid a cow. There are too few people in Kozarac, and not very many animals -- only a few cats and dogs.

I have never been received like this before. I must have been a novelty, because all the Bosnian women would come up to me and hug and kiss me on the cheeks. They'd say "lijepa" -- a word I quickly learned means beautiful -- and tell me they loved the color of my teeth.

If people dwell on my non-whiteness at home in Canada, I am offended because it has racist undertones. In Kozarac, however, this didn't bother me at all. In fact, it was all rather flattering. One woman, a teacher, hugged me on the first day and said she only picks darker skinned

students in class because they concentrate more! There may have been ethnic hatred here, but I felt no racism -- just affection.

There were always fresh flowers around Kozarac. When we first walked into Čima's house it was filled with the fragrance of roses. There was a huge vase of wild flowers on the table under the arbor at Anka's house. The first morning of the conference, a woman went up during a speech and put beautiful flowers on the table. On Wednesday morning, an elderly man came by with roses and gave one to Teresa and myself.

Later in the day, I ended up holding several roses. As we were walking down the street, we came across some Italian SFOR (the NATO Stabilization Force) officers that we had spoken to earlier. They looked so bored that I thought the roses would make their day a little better. Teresa then told them about how Women in Black from Belgrade, in an anti-war protest, had put flowers on the tanks as they rolled on to Vukovar and Kosovo. On the way back, I noticed that they had put the roses on the front of their truck. It was definitely beautification!

The day after the conference, Advocacy Project members met up in Sanski Most. As we were leaving the Hotel Sanus I noticed an Indian standing beside a jeep looking at me. My instant reaction betrayed my own prejudice -- "ugh, another Indian man!" A really horrible attitude, but one that I've developed after having Indian men look me over. So I just turned my head and kept on walking,

But when he started yelling "India, India," Teresa stopped to let him know that I was Canadian but my parents were from Kerala. I stopped walking and went back to talk. He was from Bombay and had been in Bosnia for quite a few years. Now he was working for the international criminal tribunal. He spoke fluent Bosnian, and had not seen many Indians in Bosnia. It was ironic to run into another Indian after having spent three days of being an Indian novelty.

### **An Uplifting Event**

*Peter looks at what the conference means for Kozarac:*

The story of Srcem do Mira is one of overcoming obstacles: crossing into besieged Sarajevo in 1994; meeting in both Bosnian entities in 1998; gathering this year in Kozarac despite the lack of an indoor meeting hall and opposition from the municipal government.

It is a heroic story, and the products of its persistence are obvious. But what can we learn from this week's conference?

It is disturbing that, unlike last year, no Serb NGOs were represented. This reflects a breakdown in trust among Muslim and Serb activists.

But at the same time, the conference was an uplifting event, an affirmation of return to Kozarac. By mid-June, around 150 families, or approximately 500 people, have received the keys to their reconstructed houses. As one walks through the town, one passes repaired homes with people working in their gardens. Extreme nationalist Serb graffiti on the walls is fading away. Kozarac

can inspire other Bosnians who have yet to begin the process of return.

Of course, the re-creation of Kozarac has barely begun. Several hundred displaced Serbs live in Muslim-owned houses, and the main school has been converted into a collective center for them. Most are sad people whose present situation is not so different from that of thousands of Muslims. They are simply waiting for their part of the knot of return to be untied, as it must be before extensive returns can take place in Kozarac. They do not pose a security threat to the Muslim returnees like Emsuda.

Relations between the returnees and their former Serb neighbors, who have never left, are difficult and tense. At present there is little communication between the two groups. Conference rhetoric about "building bridges" notwithstanding, it will be years before serious reconciliation can take place. There are occasional minor provocations and expressions of hostility from the Serbs.

Some Muslims are sincerely inclined to forgive past crimes, but the predominant tendency among returnees at this point is to assert their place in Kozarac and ignore the Serbs. There is also an undercurrent of violence here. Eventually it could dissipate, but the atrocities are simply too recent for this to happen in the near future.

And it is hard to face the reality of coming home without one's family. Anka, a Croat, was the first person to return to Kozarac, and she has longed for the company of her old neighbors. When they arrived for the conference with foreign visitors, she burst into a frenzy of hugging and kissing, and insisted that everyone stay at her house. Yet in a more quiet moment, she cried and said, "See what they've done to me -- I'm left without my husband and son, how can I go on living?"

Perhaps the determination to return is best exemplified by Edo, who moved from Kozarac to Sarajevo as a young man. There he trained to become a policeman, and is now a member of the Bihać police force. Edo told me that he intended to return to Kozarac and join the police force. This should become possible, according to him, when the process of converting the Republika Srpska's (RS's) police forces into multi-ethnic institutions begins next month (June 1999).

Asked why he wanted to return to Kozarac, Edo told me, "My mother will come back, as will my two brothers. Why wouldn't I return? I want to be here to look after their safety."

Edo personally knows most of the native Kozarac Serbs, and makes a point of spending time with them. He seems to seek reconciliation, while also probing into recent history. He said, "I know where some of my friends are buried, over by the church. I asked Slavko how many people were buried there, and he just looked the other way. I know who did what during the war. I can tell by their actions -- I'm perceptive that way. For instance, the man who was a former assistant to Milan Martić (an extreme nationalist Serb leader) lives in Kozarac. I know he is thinking about how to have me killed."

The international community continues to rebuild Kozarac. Emsuda Mujagić told me that the plan was to repair 1,500 houses this year. However, many houses are in worse shape than after

they were bombed in 1992. According to Emsuda, the government of the Republika Srpska is giving state land to displaced Serbs. Some of these people have been removing rafters and bricks from half-ruined Muslim-owned houses.

For instance, the house next to Emsuda's, belonging to her brother-in-law, lost its roof and walls after the war, and will now require far more resources to restore. Emsuda's assessment is that fewer than half of the planned repairs will take place this year.

I asked Edo about security for the returning Muslims of Kozarac. He told me that when there is a critical mass of returnees, say, 2,000 or 3,000, he will feel safe.

### **Srcem do Mira - an Organizations in Transition**

*Teresa reflects on the new challenges that face Srcem do Mira, and the importance of information:*

This week has shown me an organization in transition. The activists of Srcem do Mira no longer have a concrete foe and clear obstacles to overcome, as they did during the early 1990s. Back then, they knew their enemy and their aim was to save lives. Now their goal is different -- they have to learn to live with the other ethnicities again.

To cope with new challenges, their strategy has to change, and so must their methods of advocacy. Seven years ago, as their relatives were led away to camps, and they were being driven out of their homes, they survived on adrenaline and raw courage. Today they must navigate a complicated system of international donors and nationalist politicians, and steer through the sticky problem of interethnic cooperation. This will mean drawing on different resources.

It will also require deepening trust between activists on both sides of the ethnic line. The attendance of internationals here this week has reminded Bosniaks (Bosnian Muslims) that the outside world is still thinking of them. But in a way it was also a distraction. If Bosnia is to become truly multi-ethnic again, trust has to be restored among Bosnians. In this respect, the absence of Serbs this week was a disaster.

International friends who supported Emsuda during the siege of Sarajevo and her exile in Zagreb must also adapt their assistance as she and her community now prepare to go home. After this week, they may conclude that by attending a mono-ethnic meeting they are helping to perpetuate the polarization.

These internationals suffer from their own divisions. Speaking in Kozarac with representatives from UMCOR (United Methodist Committee on Relief), they complained of the competition for funding that divides NGOs and prevents them from sharing information. They are so concerned to keep their own organizations afloat that they jealously guard their corner of the NGO market. In the RS alone there are over 65 local NGOs, and around 45 international NGOs.

The lack of cooperation is made worse by the inability of NGO "coordinating bodies" to rise

above the interethnic fray. The NGO Forum in Prijedor is a case in point. This Serb group felt disillusioned after the Srcem do Mira meeting last year. After experiencing some of the same problems this year, they washed their hands of the process.

Instead, they could have put pressure on Srcem do Mira to open up the process of drafting an agenda. They could have spoken out with one voice, and made a statement about what it meant to be excluded from the process. They could have held a press conference and demanded more input. They could even have held a parallel interethnic conference. Instead, their only action was to fax a letter or two of complaint.

The OSCE could have helped more. The OSCE representative in Prijedor made a token intervention, and then withdrew from the process. She did not want to be picking up the pieces long into the winter -- as she did last year. But the international community cannot wash its hands of the process just because mistakes are made. Above all else, reintegration demands patience and perseverance.

Some of these problems come down to a lack of information. This year, Emsuda could not deal with the anger of the Serb NGOs, partly because she never learned of it in a manner that she could respond to.

Information was poorly handled at the conference, and this made the discussion disjointed. As we sat in the bombed-out square in the center of Kozarac, there was little structure to the meeting. We came together each morning for coffee, rearranged the chairs to escape the sun, fiddled with the public address system and listened to speeches from the women.

No working groups were set up. Instead, people kept going back over familiar issues -- security, property ownership, education, voting, and economy. They made recommendations that are beyond their own capacity to implement. Most of the drafting was done by a small, select group.

There is a technical side to information-sharing, and our team experienced some of the obstacles. We were not able to send e-mail, or receive telephone calls. How much worse it must be for Bosnians!

Several interesting initiatives are under way on information. One professor in Prijedor has been organizing training sessions on the use of computers and email. He also hopes to open an Internet service provider in Prijedor.

First, however, he will have to connect directly to the Internet, or to a satellite connection instead of going through Serbia, as normally happens in the RS. If he succeeds, it will be a huge step forward. Leaders of DON, an NGO that works on return issues, say that their members know how to use the Internet, but that it costs too much both in connection costs and equipment. When information is freely available to both entities of Bosnia, inter-ethnic cooperation will be that much closer.

### **Internet Access in Bosnia**

*Thanks to Frank Tiggellar from Domovina Net, who has forwarded the following information about Internet access in Bosnia:*

"It is possible to connect to the dial-in nodes of Compuserve or AOL in Zagreb from anywhere in Bosnia, but not cheap at 0.25 DM per minute. Apart from the telephone charges, you may also be billed by AOL or Compuserve for using this node. A lot of people use this setup just for e-mail. You may need special software on your laptop to use this option, so check with these Internet Service Providers (ISPs) if you want to arrange for a connection through them. It's a good 'insurance' in case all else fails, and if you don't use it because you can get a better deal locally, it will cost nothing save the monthly subscription.

- a) The Bosniak (formerly Muslim) part of Bosnia: two ISP's and a University network:
- Soros-run Internet centers in Sarajevo, Tuzla, Zenica, and Mostar. Apply to Mr. Azur Ajanović at (tel: 387 71 472580 or azur@soros.org.ba). You will receive a questionnaire, which will help Soros/Fond Otvoreno Društvo decide whether you are eligible for free access through their network.
  - The Bosnia PTT (PTT BiH) now supplies access to the Internet all over the Muslim-controlled part of the Bosnian Federation, and can be reached through the local telephone. Subscription fees are roughly equal to those in the West (i.e., pretty expensive!). Any Post Office can help you start the subscription process.
  - Should you belong to an academic group, you might also want to try and interest the University of Sarajevo (UniSa) in a project. They run two satellite Internet links (to Amsterdam and Vienna) and have dial-in facilities. Though there are some technical problems at the moment, UniSa's services are usually as reliable as PTT BiH (Soros uses a chunk of one of the UniSa channels)

b) The Croat part of Federation

\*HPT (Croatian PTT) offers Internet access. Application forms are available at Post Offices, but the service is unreliable at times.

c) Republika Srpska

\*Apart from the University of Banja Luka (connected to the WWW via Belgrade) and, again, the Soros system (hooked up via satellite), there is no Internet access available, as far as I know. To ask Soros: see the Sarajevo data I gave earlier. Whether UniBL is still serviced from Belgrade is unclear."

### **From Teresa's diary: "Annex 7! It's happening in my house!"**

Manisha and I extended our last morning in Kozarac until the last possible moment. We sat in our room typing, and trying to convey our thoughts on the meeting and on the people we had met. We spent too much time looking for Manisha's watch, which she had misplaced. Čima, our hostess, was afraid someone had stolen it -- so we wanted to find it and calm her mind. She made us polenta and yogurt for breakfast, and served it outside in the sun.

The house was bursting at the seams. Peter was helping a Serb from Croatia fill out the

paperwork that he and his family would need to go to Australia. Peter probably saved him about one hundred marks in lawyers' fees. Let's hope he thinks well of Čima. Outside, a Serb from the displaced persons' center in Kozarac was chopping wood. He had been at it all the day before, and had come in to talk to Peter at night -- still sweating from the work but smiling. An elderly Muslim woman sat outside on the front porch, sharing a coffee with Čima.

Suddenly, Čima came bouncing through the house, exclaiming "Annex 7! Annex 7! It's happening!" She was referring to the Dayton accords. Annex 7 is about refugees, and their right to return home. Here in her own living room and backyard, Čima was making it happen.

**From Peter's diary: "Let them be militant, that's the way they are. We will succeed anyway"**

After the conference, I visited Emsuda and Osman Mujagić in their rented Sanski Most house. Sitting on a bookshelf, there were some polished rocks from the mountains above Kozarac. Emsuda had been carrying these rocks around with her since 1992. She and her husband expect to return to Kozarac at the end of June, assuming the repairs on their house are completed. But they told me that Osman will have to commute to Sanski Most for three more years, as he has a contract to continue teaching in the local elementary school.

I asked them how education for the children of Kozarac would be handled. They told me that they had already arranged with a teacher from Kozarac to hold classes there in the fall. However, the Republika Srpska school curriculum is not sympathetic to the Muslims' perception of history, and it also requires the use of the Cyrillic alphabet.

I commented, "The RS government is particularly militant on this issue; how will you deal with the curriculum problem?" Emsuda said, "Let them be militant, that's the way they are. We will succeed anyway."

I asked about a schoolhouse. Emsuda said, "They want us to send our children to the school in Trnopolje, six kilometers from here. That is not going to happen. Some of these children were four or five when that school was used as a prison camp, and they were held there. Some were even born there. I would be very guilty if I were to allow them to go back there. We will solve this in Kozarac."

As one obstacle to return is overcome, another arises in its place. Perhaps the greatest obstacle is the emotional legacy of the war: the fear, anger, and mistrust that hold former neighbors apart. This problem will take a generation or more to solve, and the good will and determination of all parties will be crucial. While the citizens of Kozarac are returning to their homes, the process of reconciliation has not truly begun.