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## WOMEN FROM SERBIA AND BOSNIA FIND COMMON GROUND AT SREBRENICA GRAVESITE

July 17, 2009, Srebrenica, Bosnia and Washington, DC : Serbian and Bosnian women joined hands last week at the scene of Europe's worst modern-day massacre, in an attempt to transcend the nationalism and bitterness that has hampered recovery from the Bosnian war.

More than 50,000 people attended a [memorial service](#) on Saturday, July 11, at Potocari, Bosnia, where the Srebrenica massacre began 14 years ago. They included a delegation from the organization [Bosnian Family \(BOSFAM\)](#), many whose members lost relatives in the killing. One, Sajma Avdic, buried her brother on Saturday.

The event was also attended by activists from [Women in Black-Serbia](#), who made the long journey from Belgrade to reach out to the Bosnian women and express remorse for the atrocities committed by Serbs during the war. Their bus attracted attention from the largely Bosniak (Bosnian Muslim) crowd.

"Their presence and solidarity with the victims' families is so precious," said [Donna Harati](#), an Advocacy Project Peace Fellow volunteering with Women in Black. "It proves that not all individuals allow their country's nationalist and hateful rhetoric to define them."



Srebrenica, a Muslim enclave, was designated a safe haven by the United Nations during the war. But Bosnian Serbs overran the town on July 11, 1995, and subsequently murdered more than 8,000 men and boys. On Saturday, 534 newly-identified massacre victims were re-buried at Potocari (shown above), bringing the total number of re-buried bodies to 3,400.



Women in Black and BOSFAM are both partners of The Advocacy Project (AP) which has supported their efforts in the Balkans and the United States. AP has sent four [Peace Fellows](#) to the two groups this summer, and all four attended the Potocari ceremony which they recorded in [blogs](#) and [videos](#).

Serbia and Bosnia offer starkly different perspectives on the Bosnian war, with one country being an aggressor

and the other a victim. But the two groups have been able to find common ground as women.

Before visiting Potocari, Women in Black held a vigil in Belgrade (shown at left), and called on Serbian President Boris Tadić to declare July 11 a day of remembrance. They were jeered by Serbian nationalists - an event that was filmed by Peace Fellow [Simran Sachdev](#).

On the Bosnian side, BOSFAM has also chosen a distinctive way to help its members to remember and recover. BOSFAM trains survivors to weave carpets, as a form of therapy but also advocacy. Their most celebrated product is the [Srebrenica Memorial Quilt](#), which is constantly growing and now commemorates 120 massacre victims.

Working alongside the Bosniak-American Advisory Council for Bosnia and Herzegovina (BAACBH), which represents the Bosnian diaspora in the US, AP has shown the quilt in 13 American cities and raised more than \$7,000 for the BOSFAM survivors.

The quilt (at right) was shown by BAACBH last week on Capitol Hill, and is currently on display in the AP gallery in Washington. The project has also received support from the [Heinrich Boell Foundation of North America](#). Two AP Peace Fellows, [Alison Sluiter](#) and [Kelsey Bristow](#), are now helping BOSFAM to plan for a weaving training center in Srebrenica itself, where new quilts can be produced.



One lasting legacy of the massacre is its impact on AP's student volunteers. AP has sent eight Fellows to BOSFAM and all have been profoundly affected by the deep sadness of the Bosnian women as the July 11 anniversary approaches.

"I am overwhelmed by the pain the survivors must deal with everyday, and hope that those who recently buried their friends and relatives are able to find closure," Ms Sluiter wrote in her [blog](#) after visiting Potocari. "My wish, like that of the organization I have the privilege to currently work with, is that there will never be another Srebrenica anywhere, ever again."

- Read the blogs of BOSFAM Fellows [Alison Sluiter](#) and [Kelsey Bristow](#)
- Read the blogs of Women in Black Fellows [Donna Harati](#) and [Simran Sachdev](#)
- Watch [videos](#) from the memorial at Potocari
- Learn more about the [Srebrenica Memorial Quilt](#)