

THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF PARLIAMENTARIANS ON BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

THE PUTRA WORLD TRADE CENTRE, KUALA LUMPUR, 22 JANUARY 1994

I would like, first of all, to welcome all of you to Malaysia. Although many of you will be here for only a few days I do hope that you will have a pleasant stay in our country.

2. I would like to congratulate the international group of parliamentarians for their continued and sincere dedication to the cause of human rights in Bosnia-Herzegovina. You have made an honest gesture by coming to participate in this conference. And for that, I commend all of you.

3. The subject matter of our common concern is a grave one. The situation in Bosnia-Herzegovina is extremely critical. The human tragedy is massive and continuing. The severe winter is expected to add to the number of deaths because people are being deprived of the basic necessities to stay alive.

4. It would be your duty, as parliamentarians, to cause your respective governments to help change the situation in that unfortunate country, and save the valiant people of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

5. Let me recount very briefly what has happened to Bosnia-Herzegovina, which began with the first Serbian shelling of Sarajevo in May 1992. It was the same month that the United Nations (U.N.) accepted the new Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina as a member state. The significance was clear. Serbs had served notice that they care nothing for world opinion or the norms of human behaviour.

6. Everyone knows now that it was all part of the grand plan of Slobodan Milosevic to bring into being a greater Serbia. When Bosnia-Herzegovina became independent, he turned over the Serbian army's arsenals in that country to the Bosnian Serb soldiers resident in Bosnia-Herzegovina and to Serb civilians. No arms were given to the Bosnian members of the Yugoslav army who did not subscribe to Milosevic's Greater Serbia ambitions. Thus did Milosevic ensure that Serbian aggression against Bosnia-Herzegovina will meet with success. The U.N. embargo on arms for the combatants in Yugoslavia merely serve to weaken the government of Bosnia-Herzegovina further and enable the Karadzic's Serbs to massacre the Bosnian Muslims.

7. It is not correct to assume that the bloodbath in Bosnia-Herzegovina is a civil war between the Muslims and the rest. Although most of the defenders of Sarajevo are Muslims, who call themselves Bosniacs, many Serbs and Croats are included

in their number. The mix is also reflected in the government. They are all Bosnians and Herzegovinans.

8. The Bosnian Government desperately appealed for help from the vaunted defenders of human rights of the world. Bosnians were being killed and Bosnia-Herzegovina was about to be dismembered. But neither the European Union nor the United Nations Security Council took decisive actions. Humanitarian aid was offered subject to permission being granted by the Serbian aggressors. And as can be expected the Serbs were not quite cooperative. U.N. forces protecting food convoys may not hurt the Serbs under any circumstances. In other words, the Bosnians by consent of the U.N. are placed at the mercy of their Serbian oppressors.

9. At the same time, a well-conceived and successful strategy began to split the peoples of the newly formed country. It resulted in the Croats in Bosnia abandoning their Bosnian identity and discarding their traditional alliance with the Bosnian Muslims.

10. Bosnia-Herzegovina is the victim of the evil designs of certain people and powers who are quite happy to see the emergence of Slovenia and Croatia but will do nothing for Bosnia, although Bosnia-Herzegovina has as much right as the other two to nationhood. This kind of double standard is apparently what the new world order is about.

11. The London international conference had pledged that it would not recognise any advantage gained by force or the creation of facts. Yet Vance and Owen put together a package based on ground realities which would effectively legitimise territorial acquisition by force, ethnic cleansing and partition of Bosnia-Herzegovina along ethnic lines. And, in Geneva, they saw fit to place the leadership of the legitimate and internationally recognised Bosnian government on an equal footing with the insurgent Serbs and the Croats. Thus are aggressors legitimised.

12. The Geneva process, now presided by Owen and Stoltenberg, is bent on forcing the Bosnians to accept Serbian occupation as a basis for settlement. Certain countries which have participated in the U.N. peace keeping forces are threatening to withdraw the minimal protection they afforded the Bosnians unless the latter agree to Owen's surrender of Bosnian territories to the Serbs. History is repeating itself. The spirit of Chamberlain lives and the result is another holocaust.

13. The carnage and destruction in Bosnia-Herzegovina continue without relent. Sarajevo remains under seige until this day,

surrounded by Serbian guns capable of delivering 800 rounds of shells each day. For the fifth time the western nations have threatened to launch air-strikes against the Serbs unless they stop strangling Sarajevo. And for the fifth time the Serbs have thumbed their noses at these so-called righteous great powers. Of course, no air-strike is mounted.

14. Aggression, occupation and the redrawing of territorial boundaries by force is unacceptable in this day and age. But, when aggression is accompanied by the abominable practice of ethnic cleansing, it is not just unacceptable but despicable by any standard of international behaviour. And yet the Serbs complement this with rape and murder of young girls and women, even of little children. The so-called civilised world is horrified but is not prepared to stop the Serbs. Yet woe betide any little developing country which violates even the most trivial of human rights.

15. The Serbs know that the bark of these defenders of human rights is worse than their bite. And so they will go on raping and murdering, fully convinced that they will not only go unpunished, but they will be actually rewarded. We know that nations are usually hypocritical when conducting foreign relations. But the attitude of the powerful nations in the Bosnian affair must epitomise hypocrisy at its worse.

16. Today, the Bosnians are confronted with the choice -- either accept the tattered remnants of Bosnia-Herzegovina or risk being violently wiped off the map of the world. They are right in refusing to accept either. They are right in continuing to fight for their country. The cost to them is very high. The killings are real. People are dying. People are being starved, raped and tortured. Unless the civilised world puts a stop to what is going on in Bosnia-Herzegovina, weak nations will know no freedom. Might will always be right. Is this the message of Bosnia? Where are the champions of freedom, of human rights, of justice? Where have they gone?

17. It is immoral for all of us to hide behind the illusion that the issue of Bosnia-Herzegovina is the story of a simple civil war. It is not. It is nothing less than a war of conquest by the Serbs abetted by others who have their own hidden agendas.

18. The Americans are blaming the British and the French for preventing the use of air strikes against the Serbs. However, some very highly placed British and French sources have told me that it is the United States which is against military action against the Serbs. I frankly do not know whom to believe. I suspect that neither the Americans nor the Europeans care enough to act. They do not wish to risk the

lives of their boys for something that is not really very important for their own well-being.

19. If this is the case then they should allow the Bosnians to defend themselves. This is the right of any nation or people - the right to self-defence. But they actively and positively prevent the Bosnians from acquiring the means to fight for their own self-defence. The western nations could not have done worse if they were to hold down the Bosnians so as to enable the Serbs to batter them. It is abetment and no less.

20. And yet they claim that they are helping the Bosnians.

21. There is really no unity of support for the European Union's official position regarding Bosnia-Herzegovina. There is general dissatisfaction with the Owen peace package. There is dissatisfaction with Owen's lack of consultation with the European Union which appointed him and whose creature he is supposed to be. There is dissatisfaction with the way Owen is handling the so-called peace process.

22. It is obvious that so far no one has really approved of what the Serbs are doing. Indeed, everyone including the Vatican, the Anglican Church, the various Non-Governmental Organisations, the western media even, and the western military commanders assigned to the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR), all have condemned Serbian aggression. U.N. commanders regularly resigned because they were not allowed by Boutros Boutros-Ghali and the Security Council to take effective action to stop Serbian brutality. But the Western Governments remain obdurate, refusing to see anything wrong in their blatant disregard for the wholesale violations of every item of human rights by the Serbs in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

23. Your task, as parliamentarians, is to help shock the people and your Governments out of their self-imposed stupor. The Governments especially must not be allowed to believe that they can get away with their hypocrisy and still survive. You must do your best to force those in power to act.

24. I believe there are two things you can do. The first is to exert pressure on the U.N. Security Council to implement the various resolutions which the Council has already passed. For example, despite systematic and widespread obstruction to the delivery of international humanitarian assistance, there has been no effort to enforce Security Council resolution 770 which provides for the use of all necessary means. Security Council resolution 836 created 'safe areas' but relentless military actions by the Serbs have instead turned these safe areas into areas under siege.

25. The Security Council must now demand, and must be prepared to back its demand by the use of force if necessary -- not mere threats but actual use of force, to make the aggressors comply with certain critical requirements. Among others:

* The seige of Sarajevo must be lifted forthwith, by silencing or removing the Serbian big guns from around the city;

* All concerned parties must be made to permit, by force if necessary, the unhindered flow of humanitarian assistance;

* Tuzla airport must be opened to enable food, medicines and other essentials to reach the major surrounding towns.

26. These actions are necessary especially to save innocent lives during the harsh winter. But we must be clear about one thing. No amount of humanitarian action is going to put an end to the tragedy in Bosnia. What is needed is political and diplomatic action, supported by the use of force when necessary.

27. Therefore, the second thing you should do is to urge the Security Council to take a hard look at the Geneva process, and since there is wide agreement that the Geneva talks cannot go on as before, seize the initiative to convene a new international conference on Bosnia-Herzegovina. Perhaps the successful international conference on Cambodia could serve as a model. There, not only the relevant parties but other concerned countries also participated and helped provide the diplomatic weight.

28. There is no point in having a second or third London conference unless the principles already adopted in the first conference are implemented.

29. We cannot speak for the Bosnian leadership but we can demand that they be given a chance to save their people and their country and a fair deal in negotiations. Malaysia feels extremely concerned, not merely because Bosnia-Herzegovina has something to do with Islam and Muslims. We feel strongly whenever and wherever injustice and oppression are perpetrated. Malaysia has been equally vehement about South Africa, about Cambodia and other non-Muslim communities which have faced similar problems.

30. The Serbs and the Croats have not succeeded in destroying the essence of Bosnia-Herzegovina. After nearly two years of unceasing assault and long after the western experts have written it off, the Republic is still alive. We cannot, and should not forget Bosnia-Herzegovina. If we accept aggression

and violence by strong neighbours as legitimate then many of us who are weak will suffer the same fate.

31. Bosnia-Herzegovina used to be a cultural mix where the people lived in peace. It has as strong a historic claim to exist as do its neighbours.

32. The fundamental principle of the right of nation states to exist must remain sacred and must be protected. This includes small, multi-ethnic and multi-religious states like Bosnia-Herzegovina.

33. If we allow the law of the jungle to apply, if we allow the strongest to determine the fate of the weakest, if we allow Bosnia-Herzegovina to be obliterated, then there will be no security for anyone of us.

34. I urge you parliamentarians, therefore, to request your respective governments to:

- * Place the issue of Bosnia-Herzegovina high on your country's international agenda;

- * Commit the weight of your nations's diplomacy to call for the restarting of meaningful talks aimed at a lasting and just settlement; and

- * Assert your rights as members of the United Nations to insist that the Security Council act decisively to end the sufferings of the Bosnian people and bring back peace to that country.

35. I wish this conference success in its pursuit of a just cause. I hope that your deliberations will be productive. We need to do everything we can right now. Ethnic cleansing of Bosnia-Herzegovina must be stopped or forever must those who mouth platitudes about democracy and human rights cease and desist from their pretense at righteousness.

Thank you.