

July 14, 2005
New York Times

Srebrenica, an Obligation Unfulfilled

Ten years ago, during the war in Bosnia, ethnic Serb forces murdered more than 7,000 men and boys in Srebrenica, almost every Muslim male in the city. That genocide stands as the worst atrocity against civilians in Europe since World War II, and as a tragic symbol of the inability of United Nations peacekeepers to protect civilian populations. A decade later, the two men with ultimate responsibility for the massacre remain free. And despite the parallel tragedy of Rwanda, the major powers that run the U.N. Security Council have yet to make peacekeeping operations more credible and effective.

The survivors of Srebrenica honored the anniversary of the massacre on Monday by burying 610 of their sons and brothers and fathers, the latest to have been identified through DNA tests of bones dug up from mass graves. So far, only 2,000 people have been identified and properly buried. As Muslim children dressed in white stood amid rows of coffins, Serb policemen stood by respectfully. The president of Serbia, Boris Tadic, attended the ceremony.

But shovels of dirt will not lay this infamy to rest. The men of Srebrenica were murdered after the world betrayed them in the bloody war that raged in Bosnia, a fragment of the former Yugoslavia. The ethnic Serbs who terrorized the Srebrenica region were bent on killing or driving away every Muslim Bosnian. United Nations commanders, knowing that a Serb assault on Srebrenica was imminent, rejected calls from local peacekeepers for airstrikes on Serb positions. The United Nations disarmed the people of the town and declared it a "safe area." But the 370 Dutch peacekeepers assigned there had only light weapons and orders to use them only in self-defense. The United Nations allowed Serb soldiers to round up the men and boys, and to take them away and

kill them.

That same year, Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladic, the top political and military leaders of Bosnia's Serbs during the war, were indicted on charges of genocide by the war crimes tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. But they remain free, hiding in different parts of the still-divided region. Even when NATO had 60,000 troops in Bosnia supposedly charged with arresting wanted men, the two Bosnian Serbs moved with relative impunity. NATO governments, principally Washington, did not want to risk their troops by trying to arrest either man.

Today, 7,000 European Union troops patrol Bosnia, apparently unable to find Mr. Karadzic, who is protected by his followers and is still a hero to many of his fellow Serbs. The European troops patrolling Bosnia must make Mr. Karadzic's capture their top priority, and international pressure to arrest Mr. Mladic must increase on neighboring Serbia, where he has taken refuge and finds great sympathy among members of the army.

In the Serb Republic carved out of Bosnia, Mr. Karadzic is still perhaps the most powerful figure in the ruling party. He runs a smuggling network that controls patronage for thousands. As long as Mr. Karadzic is in control, reconciliation among Serbs, Croats and Muslims in Bosnia is a far-off dream. Capturing Mr. Karadzic and Mr. Mladic is not just away to keep faith with the dead - it is the only way to move these regions into the modern world.