

Comment: Calls for Justice at Srebrenica Burial

Author: [Chris Stephen](#)

Victims of war's worst atrocity laid to rest at last.

Eight years after the worst atrocity of the Bosnian war, survivors of the town of Srebrenica finally buried some of their dead this week.

A total of 600 of the 7,000 unarmed men butchered by Serb forces in 1995 were laid to rest in a dignified ceremony on the edge of town.

The burial of the victims has taken so long because of a combination of factors, including delays in identification of the victims, the release of their remains and the acquisition of a suitable site.

Only a tiny proportion of the town's Muslim population has returned to Srebrenica - the town is deep in Bosnian Serb territory and still dangerous for non-Serbs. The men who did the killing, after all, are still out there somewhere.

During the ceremony, NATO helicopters patrolled overhead and EU police were scattered among Bosnian Serb police officers.

Bosnia's top Muslim cleric, Reis Mustafa Ceric, gave a moving address, calling for justice - but urging the victims' families not to seek revenge.

The UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, who was unable to attend the burial, said the institution's failure to protect people it had promised to keep safe will "haunt our history forever".

Annan is not to blame for UN commanders not ordering air strikes that would have saved the population.

Just who is to blame remains unclear. A recent Dutch parliamentary inquiry Accepted that Dutch troops could have done more.

But the key question - why NATO airpower was blocked by key UN commanders - remains unanswered.

Of course, while UN inaction was deplorable, it was Bosnian Serb forces who committed the atrocity.

A leading commander, Radislav Krstic, is already serving a record 46-year sentence for the crime. More trials are ongoing and the hunt is still on for the man accused of ultimate responsibility - General Ratko Mladic.

It is one of life's ironies, however, that until very recently, while the wives and mothers of the dead suffered both the agony of loss and penury, Mladic was reportedly wine and dined in the finest Belgrade restaurants by friends in the Yugoslav army.

Justice? In the next world, maybe. In this one, the jury is still out.

Chris Stephen is IWPR project manager in The Hague.

Location: Bosnia and
Herzegovina

Focus: International Criminal Tribunal for the former
Yugoslavia

Source URL: <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/comment-calls-justice-srebrenica-burial>