

## **Tribunal Urged to Continue Beyond 2010**

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I'm a young journalist, who's been learning the ropes with IWPR, but felt that I was ready for a challenge or two.

However, when I first heard from my editor that I should write a story on an international conference of legal experts which would discuss the future of the Hague tribunal, I was slightly nervous.

Until then, I had written only courtsides, which meant this would be an entirely different experience for me and a whole new challenge. But I was thrilled that IWPR had enough trust in me to let me write about an event which was focused on such important issues.

I grew up in Sarajevo and was here when the war in Bosnia started in 1992. I was forced to leave my home and go to Israel as a refugee at the age of nine. My parents were not able to join me, so we had been separated for several years before we reunited in Sarajevo in 1996.

During this trying time, I had learned from both the Israeli and Bosnian experience what it means to be in war. I also learned about the importance of reconciliation and facing the truth, which I firmly believe is one of the most important roles of the Hague tribunal.

While I was preparing for this assignment, I searched local media archives for features about the implications of the tribunal's work and its verdicts for the people in the former Yugoslavia. I also looked for the opinions of various officials on the tribunal's completion strategy, because that was one of the subjects of this conference. The Hague tribunal is due to finish all trials by 2009 and all appeals by 2010, and its completion strategy is a constant source of controversy, because many believe it affects the fairness of the trials being held there.

The morning of the conference was cold and foggy and it took me much longer than the usual two hours to get to Tuzla, in central Bosnia where the event was being held. While I was driving on the deserted and slippery road through the harsh Bosnian mountains, my mind was focused on the conference. I was wondering whether events like this one would help ordinary people understand the importance of the Hague tribunal. Because every trial held in this court helps us understand our recent past cannot be contested.

The conference itself did not disappoint me. Various issues were discussed, and one of them was the idea of opening a regional court for war crimes which would be based in Sarajevo, Belgrade or Zagreb and would continue the work of the Hague tribunal after it closes down.

However, much to my surprise, the participants had completely opposite views on this issue. The local NGOs were the first to support this idea, and it was their belief that a regional war crimes court would help bring justice to the victims much more effectively than a court in some far away country.

On the other hand, the tribunal's officials and international law experts firmly disagreed with this idea and emphasised all the problems a regional court would face, such as funding, regulations, accountability etc.

I personally believe that even though the idea of having a regional court for war crimes, which wouldn't have to worry about a completion strategy, is very appealing, the problems it would face are too great to be ignored. In a region where simple border disputes last for decades, I cannot foresee a way for politicians to agree on complex issues such as who this court would answer to or how it would manage to be independent from various political influences.

The conference received a fair amount of coverage in the Bosnian media; however, I have to say that it appeared to have generated very little real interest. Maybe that's because people here are tired of conferences and round table discussions, which rarely produce concrete results.

After completing the assignment and reading my feature on the IWPR website, I was rather satisfied, because I felt I did a solid job of analysing the issues. I also felt that the article had addressed the importance of the Hague tribunal for reconciliation in the region and building a stable future. In other words, I was rather proud with my work.

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