



## Opening of the Exhibition 'Srebrenica Genocide – the Failure of the International Community' at the Potocari Memorial Centre

**Speech by Miriam Struyk, PAX**

Dragi dame i gospodo, postovani partnere, dragi prijatelje.

Velika mi je čast što, u ime moje organizacije mogu reći par riječi o ovom važnom danu i o ovoj izlozbi. Kao što možete čuti, govorim pomalo bosanski jezik, ali ću ipak nastaviti na engleskom.

Dear ladies and gentlemen, respected partners, dear friends,

It is an honour for me to stand here and to say, in name of my organisation, a few words to you on this important exhibition. As you might notice I speak a bit of Bosnian language, but I will nevertheless continue in English.

Almost 22 years ago, the unimaginable happened here. Almost 22 years, that is more than a generation ago... Almost 22 years taken away from more than 8.000 men, women, and children murdered by the Bosnian Serb army during those horrible days. Almost 22 years, but to so many of you, it must feel like yesterday...

Those years, those lives can never be restored. But what so many of you are trying, and what we as PAX are humbly supporting, is to bring those who are guilty to justice and to find the truth. And by doing so, we work to restore their memories and to honour the lives of the many, many people that were murdered or are still missing. And by telling their story, by showing their fate, we do not only want to honour them. We also want to prevent other people from suffering the same fate, be they in South Sudan, in Syria or in Yemen. Prevent other parents, children, brothers and sisters, from suffering from war crimes and a failing international community.

An international community is made of states, of institutions and organisations, but first and foremost by its citizens. And the failure to protect those in need, then and now, is a failure by us all. Political complexities can never be an excuse for not doing all we can to protect civilians from severe human rights abuses, from crimes against humanity and genocide.

Today we are opening an exhibition, developed by Kamp Westerbork, the PMC and PAX, that will do just that: give a context of what happened, honour the dead and strengthen the call that this should never happen again.

Everybody mourns in his or her own way, but it is important to also have common spaces and dignified traditions. The first time I went to a commemoration for July 11, was in sport centre Mejdan in Tuzla in 1996, and many more commemorations followed. Victims were reburied, this memorial centre in Potocari was opened, and became an official state institution.

And now there is this powerful exhibition, right on the compound where people sought shelter, but in vain. This exhibition is primarily a place for the survivors, for their stories and their grief. But as it was also the former HQ of Dutchbat, special attention is given to the role of the international community and in particular the role of the Dutch operating under the UN umbrella. Their stories are part of the bigger narrative and I would like to thank those present for being here today and for supporting the development of this exhibition.

My organisation, PAX, formerly known as IKV, is a Dutch peace organisation that worked for many years in Bosnia and Herzegovina, starting in 1993. After July 1995, we supported numerous initiatives, here in Bosnia, but also in The Netherlands where we for example organise the yearly commemoration in The Hague. We also offered our support to the court case of Hasan Nuhanovic and



Family Mustafic. A court case in which the Dutch Supreme Court ultimately decided that the Dutch state is responsible for the death of their loved ones, who should not have been forced to leave this compound.

Srebrenica is and will always be a dark page in the history of the Netherlands. And at PAX we still believe that the Dutch government should offer apologies to the survivors for mistakes made by the Dutch government.

This exhibition is a living exhibition where new facts, new pictures, new eyewitness statements can be added. For PAX, it is certainly not the end of more than 20 years of cooperation. We will continue to support the PMC and the survivors in their continuing development of this important museum and exhibition.

The role of the Dutch is also visible in the many books that were published on Srebrenica in the Netherlands. Books which also deserve a place here in the library of the PMC. We will therefore offer its director Mr. Mersed Smajlovic, a collection of 41 publications. As a symbol of these 41 I will give you one beautiful photobook, made by Claudia Heyenman.

In these books, but also in numerous other books and documentaries, so many words are spent on what happened here and yet no words can capture the tragedy that happened. No words can ever do justice to what has unfolded here. But by sharing stories, by showing pictures, by remembering loved ones and by making sure that they are never forgotten we can live up to the saying: No one is dead, until his or her name is never mentioned again. Thank you.

Miriam Struyk  
9 February 2017, PAX