



**A Commentary by Annette Lantos Tillemann-Dick  
Regarding the Recent Conviction of Serbian Genocide Leaders**

On June 10<sup>th</sup> the UN War Crimes Tribunal sentenced two Bosnian Serbs to life in prison for their role in the slaughter of 8,000 Muslim boys and men in Srebrenica in the former Yugoslavia. The conviction and sentencing of Vujadin Popovich and Ljubisa Beara underscores a precedent set by the Nuremberg Trials after WWII. The Lantos Foundation for Human Rights and Justice emphatically supports that precedent of holding individuals responsible for their participation in acts of genocide.

Those who actively participate in efforts to systematically annihilate groups whose ethnicity or religion may differ from their own must be held accountable for these acts of conscious, willful inhumanity. Counter genocide expert, Mike Pryce, has identified distinct milestones on the road to genocide. Pryce says of the convictions which took place in the Netherlands, "This is an important way of holding individuals responsible for their part in directing a collective crime."

The decision of the UN war crime tribunal represents a modest success in the effort to bring some of the culpable to justice. It also serves to warn others who may be involved in ethnically motivated killing. But these judgments came slowly and at an exorbitant price. Hundreds of millions of dollars have been spent on a handful of trials. At one point over \$100,000 a month was being spent by the US to fund the defense of one Serbian accused of mass murders. If these resources had, even in part, been directed towards local community needs the benefits would have been remarkable.

Though the inflammatory content of the UN tribunal trials would have challenged the resources of many local courts, the State Courts of Bosnia are composed of part international and part local judges. Utilizing balanced national institutions to mete out justice would create more economically viable models for future offenses.

After the Holocaust of WWII, Jewish survivors took up the mantra, "Never again." In the wake of every genocide, balanced, caring humans are universally motivated to cry, "Never again!" again. Unfortunately, the spectacles of mass human slaughters have become painfully common place in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. These atrocities mock notions of genuine human progress. Working in a multilateral way to intervene before such travesties occur and developing mechanisms to respond sanely and swiftly when the world community does not successfully counter crimes against humanity is essential to maintaining fundamental civility in a global community.