

November 1, 1995

President Slobodan Milosevic  
Serbian Delegation  
Wright Patterson Air Force Base  
Dayton, Ohio 45433

Dear President Milosevic,

Christ's Peace!

At the time in August when Croatian forces recaptured the Krajina, I wrote to the Secretary of State of the Holy See, Angelo Cardinal Sodano, asking for Catholic Church intervention with the Croatian government and people to act generously toward the Serbian people who have centuries-old roots in that area, making it genuinely, and not merely rhetorically, possible for them to return to their homes safely and in peace.

An appeal by way of the Holy See seemed the most practical way to reach the Croats. My conviction was that the practice of mass expulsion of population, "ethnic cleansing" as it has euphemistically been called, has been the devil of this war, and that if that policy could be convincingly reversed, the climate of the entire war would be changed. Reconciliation and the restoration of the civility that has so long characterized the region of what was called Yugoslavia could be achieved to a degree that would be possible in no other way.

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Subsequently, as the tide of war began to turn against the Bosnian Serbs, I wanted to make the same point with Bosnians. Having made many Muslim friends in the United States over the course of many years' effort to work with them and with American Jews for peace in the Middle East, I approached them with the request that they make a like appeal to Bosnian Foreign Minister Mohammed Sacirbey, who seemed the most appropriate person for all of us to contact in that quarter, and I wrote to him myself to that purpose. I enclose copies of both letters for you here.

I am sure it is wisdom in our United States diplomats to appeal most directly to you, President Milosevic, to find the ways to still the war. I myself believe that terrible things have been done by Serbs in the course of this war. I have always known that the needs of ethnic Serbs throughout the region must be served, and their genuine fears put to rest. The vast population expulsions, with massive killings, have been a blot on their society, like the outrages of the Croatian Ustashe in an earlier age. I am familiar with the excesses in many other conflicts with which I have dealt, and know that they basically represent paranoid anxiety and despair, not essentially evil character in people.

As the formal negotiations get under way, I appeal now to you to see the options in the situation in this way. There is not now going to be a "greater Serbia," absorbing large tracts of Croatia and Bosnia. As the accepted representative of the ethnic Serbs of those countries, you now have the task of making their life with the neighbors they will always have (certainly in Bosnia, but only if their return can be won in Croatia) as safe as it can be.

I would hope a primary objective of your diplomacy would be a safe and peaceful return of Serbs to the areas from which they

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Have been expelled in Croatia and Bosnia. The reciprocal side of such a policy should be the safe and peaceful return of Bosnian Muslims and Croats to areas from which they have been expelled by Serbs.

This need not be at all incompatible with the already agreed objective of having areas of regional jurisdiction for the Bosnian Serbs and for the Bosnian-Croatian Federation. It is already clear that the American mediators will not accept the secession of such areas from Bosnia-Herzegovina or their annexation by Croatia and Serbia. The divided internal jurisdiction will give the several peoples assurance of fairness and judgment by their peers. Since it will be within one state, though a complex one, there is non reason why Serbian residents should not be free to appeal to Serbian jurisdiction at need, and Bosnian or Croatian residents likewise be free to appeal to the jurisdiction of their peers within any area of the country.

When I look back at the 20<sup>th</sup>-century history of your region, it is clear that the conflicts of the earlier years, as all your people struggled against the imperial incursions of both Turks and Austrians, were for their freedom to be a Yugoslavia. That ideal has been poisoned at various times by the hegemony aspirations of various internal forces. But despite all that, the underlying accomplishment of your society throughout the century has been one of civilized pluralism, the most impressive single European manifestation of creative diversity. Its recovery should be the reasonable ambition of your regional society now that there is a chance to restore the peace. There is good reason not, at this juncture, to look for a single state or structure. But patterns of mutual accommodation are within your reach, and can calm the bad feelings that these recent paranoid excesses have generated.

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That would spare you the prospect of the ethnic rages spreading now to parts of Serbia itself, like Kosovo, or into Albania and Macedonia, with further irreversible damage to all your countries.

President Milosevic, the place of Serbia has been damaged by this war. I know that Serbs and their many friends feel they have been judged by a different standard than the other people in this fighting. The spectacles of Vukovar, of Dubrovnik, of Sarajevo, Srebrenica and most recently the region of Banja Luka have so shocked all of us elsewhere in the world as to leave a stain that has not been gainsaid even by the horrors of the Krajina expulsion or the siege of Mostar. The perpetrators of the worst of those events, Dr. Karadjic and General Mladic, have had to yield to you to negotiate on behalf of the Serbs of Bosnia because of the repulsion their deeds have earned. It is open to you now, by some imaginative diplomacy that, while jealously guarding the safety and rights of the Serbs in Bosnia and everywhere else in the region, aims at healing and a restoration of civility, to restore the deserved good name of Serbs. I wish you well in that endeavor, and look for the good of all the peoples of your region.

With prayers and best wishes, I am yours,

In Christ,

Raymond G. Helmick, S.J.