

Oglas američkih profesora I naučnika objavljen
15. Jula 1993. u New York Review of Books

CULTURAL GENOCIDE IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

As scholars and educators professionally concerned with the study of the cultures and peoples of the region where the tragedy of Bosnia is taking place, we note with dismay one particularly appalling dimension of that tragedy that has not been sufficiently brought to the attention of the world community: the systematic destruction of Bosnia's cultural heritage.

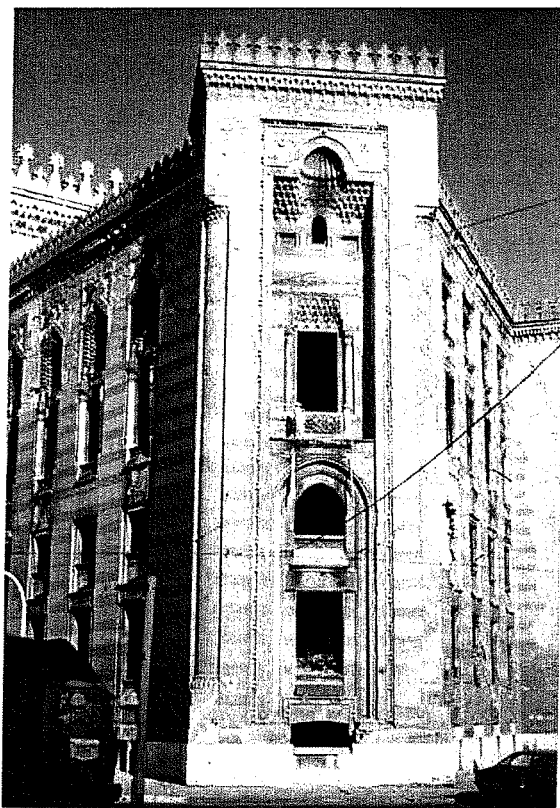
Naturally, the loss of lives and human dignity is foremost among our concerns and should be swiftly addressed by our governments and the international bodies that have thus far failed to do so effectively. We call upon our governments and the U.N. to take expeditious and decisive action to stop the killing and human suffering. We also call upon them to ensure that past achievements of the "ethnic cleansing" campaign will not be recognized, and that the crimes of those responsible for these atrocities will be neither rewarded nor forgotten.

We wish to express our solidarity with the Bosnian people, and also with those brave dissident voices in Serbia and elsewhere who continue to speak out against the perpetrators of this genocidal war.

To see the conflict as a war between Muslim Bosnians and Orthodox Serbs is to fall for the propaganda of the Serbian government that seeks thus to gain the sympathy of Western and Russian public opinion. The war, and ultimately the struggle within the conscience of the world, is not between Islam and Christianity: it is between a political vision that wants to build a Bosnian state on the foundation of that country's pluralist heritage and an exclusionist Serbian nationalism that is using religion to mobilize forces of violence to destroy that heritage.

Beginning in April 1992, Serbian attacks on Bosnian cities and towns have deliberately and successfully targeted national libraries, museums and archives, in the process wiping out nearly the entire written record of Bosnia's history. Among the losses is Bosnia's National Library in Sarajevo, which also contained the university's holdings and the country's national archive of newspapers and periodicals. Prior to its destruction, the National Library held over 1.5 million volumes, including 155,000 manuscripts and

rare books. Bombarded for three days with incendiary grenades on 25-27 August 1992, it was reduced to ashes.



Other losses include not only the destruction of libraries and museums, but also of hundreds of historic buildings, mosques, churches, and synagogues throughout Bosnia, including:

- the Franciscan monastery in the city of Mostar that contained the main historical archives for Hercegovina, destroyed by Serb forces last summer along with Mostar's cathedral, thirteen mosques, all the restored houses of the old town, and six of its seven historic bridges;
- extensive collections of oriental manuscripts, documents, books and microfilm at the Oriental Institute in Sarajevo, the largest institution of its kind in Southeastern Europe, destroyed by Serbian shelling on 17 May 1992;
- the Gazi Husrev Beg Library in Sarajevo, founded in 1537, with its treasure trove of illuminated manuscripts, Islamic and Jewish, dating back to the 12th century, shelled and destroyed on 5 May 1992, along with the

adjacent 16th-century Mosque of Gazi Husrev Beg;

- hundreds of mosques destroyed as part of Serbian ethnic cleansing operations, such as the Old Mosque at Trebinje, burned to the ground on the night of 27 January 1993; an eyewitness report reflects the impact of cultural genocide: "It burned all night as drunken men in paramilitary uniforms fired machine guns in the air. By morning, Trebinje's 500-year old mosque was ashes and a dark-eyed young man, Kemal Bubic, 29, joined thousands of people moving eastward". At that moment, everything I had was burned down, " he said. "It's not that my family was burned down, but it's my foundation that burned. I was destroyed" (Boston Globe, 13 February 1993)

We stress that many of these monuments and buildings were not merely destroyed in the fighting, but were systematically and deliberately targeted.

This is clearly a corollary to an ethnic cleansing campaign that negates a people's right to exist because of their cultural heritage. It is as part of the same evil logic that Bosnian intellectuals and community leaders have been singled out for assassination.

We cannot remain silent in the face of the continued destruction of the people of Bosnia and the campaign to annihilate their cultural heritage and to foreclose their vision of a pluralistic, secular and tolerant society. That is why we wish to bring these facts to the attention of our governments and the general public. We also call upon our colleagues in professional organizations and other national and international bodies to add their voices to our appeal. To speak out against evil is to bear witness; to keep silent is act of complicity.

