

# Banja Luka—Ethnic Cleansing Paradigm or Counterpoint to a Radical Future



June 11, 1995

Briefing of the  
Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe

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# **BANJA LUKA—ETHNIC CLEANSING PARADIGM OR COUNTERPOINT TO A RADICAL FUTURE**

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**TUESDAY, JUNE 11, 1995**

COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE  
WASHINGTON, DC.

The Commission met, pursuant to adjournment, at 12:00 p.m., in room 2255, Rayburn House Office Building, Samuel Wise, International Policy Director of the Commission, presiding.

Mr. Wise. Good morning. We welcome you to another briefing of the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe. I am the international policy director for the Commission. My name is Samuel Wise. I am here representing not only the Commission, but our Commission leaders.

Our chairman, Mr. Smith, hoped to be here to do the introductions and the opening himself this morning, but unfortunately, he was called away on something else that is also very important for him. We hope that sometime during the course of the briefing, he'll be able to drop in, and we have an indication that some of our other members may be able to drop in. But as you all know, on the Hill, during the middle of the week, there are a lot of competing activities.

Since the adoption of the Dayton Agreement last December, the Helsinki Commission has hosted several briefings on the elections in Bosnia-Herzegovina that are mandated by that agreement. The Commission has been particularly interested in these elections, and not only because of its past focus on the Bosnian conflict and the atrocities associated with the conflict.

The OSCE, the multilateral European institution which includes the United States and Canada as members, which has emerged from the diplomatic process created by the Helsinki Final Act, has been tasked with preparing for elections in Bosnia by September, as well as with certifying that conditions exist for free and fair elections especially in regards to respect for human rights like freedom of movement, freedom of expression, and freedom of association.

There is now a much-publicized debate over whether the OSCE will be able credibly to certify that such conditions exist in time for a mid-September election date, which is the subject of an International Relations Committee hearing being held right now. It is therefore fitting that we have this briefing today on Banja Luka, as the political scene there will have a major impact on Bosnia's future.

Banja Luka is the second largest city in Bosnia-Herzegovina and is located in the northwest far from Sarajevo. Since the beginning of the Bosnian conflict, the city was firmly in the hands of the Bosnian Serb rebels, and Dayton places the city in the Republika Srpska, the newly created Serbian republic.

Nevertheless, the city and the region surrounding it has had significant non-Serb popu-

lation, Bosniacs or Muslim Slavs, Croats, Ukrainians, not to mention a significant percentage of ethnically mixed Yugoslavs. Much of this population has been ethnically cleansed; in other words, forcibly expelled, raped, tortured, and often killed. While some instances of ethnic cleansing there took the form of subtle measures, the most notorious concentration camps, including Omarska, were in the Banja Luka region.

Still, a determined number of non-Serbs remained and survived. As far as the Serb inhabitants are concerned, it is not clear whether they genuinely supported the horrors being done in their name. Now the city is the scene of apparent differences among Serb political activists with highly divergent points of view. Bosnia's future may well hinge on whether moderates or radicals win in the elections in that region.

Our panelists today will shed some light on the current situation there. First we have the Most Reverend Franjo Komarica, the Roman Catholic Bishop of Banja Luka. The bishop remained in his diocese throughout the war despite threats and harassment. He was under house arrest for much of 1995. Bishop Komarica is not only known for his strong commitment to his diocese and its inhabitants, but is known among Croat leaders and society for his moderate views advocating reconciliation as well.

Our next panelist is Obrad Kesic of the International Research and Exchanges Board, properly known as IREX. Mr. Kesic is a well-known specialist on Yugoslav affairs here in Washington, especially when it comes to interpreting the latest developments being reported in the region. He traveled extensively throughout the region earlier this year.

Our third panelist is Diane Paul, a nurse from Baltimore, whose commitment to humanitarian causes in the former Yugoslavia has made her a regional specialist as well. Last November, she authored a Human Rights Watch/Helsinki report documenting ethnic cleansing in and around Banja Luka and has recently returned from a trip to the region.

I'd like to thank our panelists for coming here today, and I will turn to each of them to make a short presentation, following which we'll have an opportunity for questions from you in the audience. So I will begin with Bishop Komarica. I would just say that his interpreter is Mr. Vlastic, Father Vlastic. Thank you.

Bishop Komarica. [Through interpreter] Honorable friends, I greet you today as friends of peace and God-loving people. I would like to thank you for your interest specifically regarding Banja Luka, my home town. I would like to thank you for this opportunity given to me to express my concerns and my hopes for my country. I would like to thank you on behalf of all the citizens of my city, regardless of their national or state orientation.

You know that I'm a Catholic bishop and not a political representative of any specific group. I'm not assuming the representation neither of Croatian people specifically, nor Bosnian Muslims or Serb people in this territory. Regretfully, there is no politician available or existing right now to represent the views of my country, of my city, especially to represent the views of the people, of tens of thousands of voiceless people who have no voice.

As a leader and a Christian, I have an obligation to help all the people in their effort to be human and to be God-loving people. I would like to help every human being to affirm their human rights and their freedom and to establish their right to existence. It is now 6 years that hundreds of thousands of people whose basic human rights have been taken away and denied.

That is the right to life, the right to professions, the right to possess homes and live, the right to have a country, the right to work and to secure a living, the right to have a social and

security support, the right of movement, the right of freedom of religion, the right to raise your own children in your own convictions, the right of freedom of conscience, the right of equality of being free to belong to a political or a different faith group.

We cannot talk at all about these rights for thousands of our citizens. The denial of basic human rights has taken place without the presence of any media or any voice to publicly declare this. We had the impression that we are forgotten in our corner of the world. We were strengthened only by our faith in our God, whom we trust that he has the potential to redeem us.

This thing that I once again mention is really the basis, that we try to respect all our neighbors and not do any harm to any one of them. As in other parts of Bosnia there were confrontations, armed confrontations and clashes, in this part of Bosnia there was no war and no open conflict between different groups of different nationalities or faiths.

We opted for a different option here. We rather accepted denial of our basic human rights than to hurt our neighbors and to establish conflict. We are talking here about people who have been peaceful and made every single effort to remain people who respect others and try to live together. The only blame that they receive is that they did not belong to a side or a group of people who by all means and by all forces and by brutal approach has tried to establish clean ethnic territory.

The biggest number, the highest percentage, of the people in this region, be they Serbs or Bosnian Muslims or Croatians, have desire to remain in peaceful coexistence in this region. The Catholic Croatians in this region have shown by their behavior that they are capable and ready to live together, capable to live together in peace with the other two people, which is namely Serbs and Bosnian Muslims.

This desire to live in peace is denied by the members of the existing political structure, and despite all our efforts to live the commandment of respect and love for others, to love those who did so much evil to us, we are brutally hurt again and again and punished for no reason, and not just from the side of extreme nationalists, but those by international democrats.

We ask all those who still crush our human rights: “Why are you doing this to us? Are we people for you? Are we human beings for you? We ask for the basic human rights that you enjoy. If we are guilty, we would ask you to prove it to us, and if we are not guilty, then you are doing great injustice to us when you are denying to us basic human rights.”

I am taking this opportunity to tell you and to express to all American peace-loving people, God has given you in this country a generosity of the heart. Your land is almost like a garden, that there are many wonderful plants and beautiful flowers. You are a garden of different people, different cultures, different groups and religions.

The common characteristic of all of you is the freedom and love for peace and respect. In this country, it is especially appreciated, especially important human rights and human honor and human dignity. These are the precious gifts of our civilization as though a gift that you are emphasizing multiculturalism and multi-faced religion.

You are an ideal and an example for us, and you are a leader for so many other people in the world. When we would like to affirm similar in Banja Luka, we are punished for that. You know that. Will you with clear conscience allow, continue to allow, that the basic human rights are still denied in my city and in my country? And they are being punished just because they would like to be like you—free, human and democratic people.

I expect an answer from you, which you have to give unto your conscience first and then to your people and then to the world and then hopefully to us as well.

Regardless of how you look at us and for what you think of us, we in Banja Luka are definitely fighting. With enormous efforts, we try to protect and restore civilization. I hope that we will not remain alone in this effort. We hope that we'll find friends who will support us in this effort. We hope to find these supporters in Europe and especially here in the United States. I am quite sure that I will not be disappointed in this expectation.

Thank you for listening.

Mr. Wise. Thank you very much, Bishop. Now let's turn to Mr. Kesic, please.

Mr. Kesic. Thank you, Mr. Wise, and my thanks to the Commission for allowing me this opportunity to be before you. I saw my role today as trying to put in context the political developments, the political battle that's being waged, within the Republika Srpska surrounding the issue of Banja Luka as the largest city, largest urban center, and also, given what has happened over the past few weeks, the fact that the international community and especially the international media have presented the developments, the political developments, within the Republika Srpska as being along the lines or easily defined between those that are aligned with Banja Luka and those that are aligned with Pale.

I'm going to try to put all this into the context of a more broader series of issues such as the elections and such as what our own policy has been up to this point and what it can be leading into the election.

Over the past few weeks, Banja Luka, the largest and only true city in the Republika Srpska, has come to the forefront of international attention as a result of the political showdown between former Prime Minister Rajko Kasagic and Radovan Karadzic. With this confrontation coming to a head, although Banja Luka had often been at the center of international attention during the war in Bosnia as a result of human rights abuses and mass expulsions committed in the area.

Now, however, Banja Luka and its political leadership has been transformed by an international community best fit for success into a symbol of moderation and cooperation. The truth, I argue, lies somewhere in between the excesses committed during the war and the model of moderation that the international community and Carl Bildt have convinced themselves exists.

Today I intend to briefly examine the rivalry between Banja Luka and Pale and to put this rivalry in context of the broader political picture within the Republika Srpska. I will not concentrate my remarks on the human rights situation in Banja Luka as there are individuals on this panel more familiar with this situation than I am and as time is limited.

Pale versus Banja Luka. The recent showdown between Kasagic and Karadzic was the culmination of a long process of disagreement and rivalry between certain political and intellectual elite within Sarajevo and Banja Luka. Throughout the war in Bosnia, this rivalry has, on several occasions, led the political confrontation between these elite. However, it is important to understand the true nature of this rivalry and not exaggerate the depths of animosity between these elite.

Traditionally and historically, Banja Luka has been a provincial regional center, both economically and politically. It has also historically been overshadowed by other Bosnian cities, namely the capital of Sarajevo, and to some extent, Tuzla.

Now as the largest and most important urban settlement within the Republika Srpska,

its leaders are coping with an identity crisis and seek to have the city firmly and confidently assume the role of a capital. On the other hand, Karadzic and most of the other senior political and party leadership in Pale come from Sarajevo and continue to view Banja Luka in its historic provincial role.

Up until last February, Karadzic and the rest of the Serbian Democratic Party, the SDS leadership, hoped to claim a part of Sarajevo as the capital of the Republika Srpska. The mass exodus of Serbs from Sarajevo suburbs ended this dream. Currently, the unresolved question of Brcko influences the SDS leadership to try and establish Brcko as a temporary capital, although the debate on the capital is yet to be resolved.

Karadzic and the other senior Serb leaders believe that Pale or a town along the Drina River need to be transformed, even if artificially, into a second urban center in order to give the Republika Srpska an economic and political viability. In light of these aspirations in Banja Luka and Pale, it is important to remember that the political elite within both cities share the same long-term goals of protecting the integrity and autonomy of the Republika Srpska, to firmly establish the Republika Srpska as a distinct political entity within Bosnia and to eventually unite with the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

For the most part, this is a debate over tactics and not over objectives. The Banja Luka leadership believes that the current situation demands greater cooperation with the international community in Belgrade and that this would in no significant way affect the long-term goals of the Republika Srpska. The Pale leadership, having been isolated and in their eyes misled by the international community, believe that cooperation should be strictly limited to issues which are not central to the establishment of greater links to the Bosnia broad federation.

Also given that Banja Luka has been targeted by Serbia's president, Slobodan Milosevic, as a center for his efforts at undermining opposing leadership, Karadzic and his inner circle do not trust the commitment of some of the Banja Luka leaders to the National interests established by the Republika Srpska parliament.

It is also important to remember that the ideological and political divisions between Banja Luka and Pale are not as black and white as made up by many outside observers, especially among the American media. The long war and the significant population shifts during the war have served to homogenize people's political attitudes and politics within the Republika Srpska.

During a recent visit to Banja Luka, I was told that the city's population was currently over 220,000 people of which their official estimates were that 70,000 and more were refugees and displaced persons. This complicates any serious attempt to make political generalizations concerning Banja Luka's role in politics within the Republika Srpska.

Pale versus Belgrade, Banja Luka caught in the middle. Serbia's president, Slobodan Milosevic, has been determined to rid himself of Karadzic and the SDS leaders since the spring of 1994 when he was publicly rebuffed and humiliated by their refusal to accept his demands that they agree to the Vance-Owen peace plan.

Unlike in Krajina, Milosevic did not have a strong cadre of politicians willing or able to take on the SDS leaders. Since 1994, he has set out to create challenges to the SDS. He has tried to exploit regional rivalries, rivalries within the SDS, disagreements between the political and military leaderships within the Republika Srpska, and has tried to exploit his Socialist Party with some success to the Republika Srpska.

So far, he has not been able to finish Karadzic and his inner circle off, but it is not the result of a lack of trying. The Socialist Party of the Republika Srpska currently is the only serious challenger to the SDS. Recent polls have the Socialist Party close to the SDS in popular support. A few polls, including a recent poll by USIA or authorized by USIA, show that the Socialists are actually leading the SDS.

The Socialist Party, however, currently lacks charismatic leadership and also lacks a strong party machine at the local level. It interestingly has almost completely adopted the political platform of the SDS and on some issues, such as integrity of the Republika Srpska, has tried to out-patriot the SDS. In fact, the point of attack that the Socialists are using is a direct attack on the leadership of the SDS leadership—namely Karadzic, to some extent Mladic, but no one has yet been able to take on Mladic directly—on the basis of how they conducted the war.

The current argument and the vulnerability of the SDS leadership centers around the issue of whether or not they undermined the military capability and the defense capability of the military, the Bosnian Serb military. On this point, the Socialists are trying to make ground. But on issues that the international community has sought to see a split, such as the future integration of the Bosnian Serb community with the Bosniac and the Croat communities within Bosnia, there is really no significant or major difference in policy between the parties.

With the elections expected to be held in September, the SDS is confident that it can fend off the Socialists and expects to win at least the plurality of the vote, but has already made overtures to political parties on the right and even a coalition with the Socialists is not out of the question and may hinge on Milosevic's relationship with the international community and, to a large extent, to his relationship with the U.S.

If, in Milosevic's eyes, he has not received enough from the U.S. for the moves that he has made over the past several months, it is quite conceivable that he can once again push the Socialists within Bosnia to work more closely together with the ruling SDS.

I want to say a little bit about the people, the Bosnian Serb people. It is important to keep in mind that regardless of who the political figure is, it is very difficult for any political figure to go against the popular thinking or the popular will of most of the Bosnian Serb people.

Recent surveys, again citing also the USIA survey in April, but other surveys that were commissioned by various institutions in Belgrade, show that the bulk of the Bosnian Serb population is against integration with the federation. They do support greater cooperation, especially on economic issues, but when it comes to questions on political integration or into some type of national integration with the federation, they are against it. The USIA survey put this over 90 percent of those asked amongst the Bosnian Serbs were against integration.

The support for the political leadership is very strong and has grown over the past few months. Karadzic's support remains within the 60 percent level in most surveys; whereas, Mladic's support by almost every survey that's been conducted within Bosnia shows that his level of support is well over 90 percent. In fact, when you travel throughout Bosnian Serb territory, it is very clear that the most influential political personality is Mladic. In fact, the opposition leaders within Banja Luka, and at a meeting that we had in February, stated that if Mladic were to become politically active or take on a political role in the elections, that he would determine who would rule in the Republika Srpska.

There is a growing but grudging support for Dayton, and I see this as a positive, that over the past several months, from December, for example, in the last USIA poll that was conducted, to April, there was an increase in the numbers of Bosnian Serbs who support the Dayton Agreement. This support is grudging in the sense that they do not see it as an ideal solution in most of the problems that led to the war, but as long as it prevents the outbreak of war or fighting, they're willing to abide by it and are willing to see it enforced.

I think this is something that the international community and, in particular, the government of the United States, can build on, is this desire to see the Dayton Agreement end the war and to see support for a stable and long-lasting peace develop.

The No. 1 concern in most people's minds—and this is not limited only to the Bosnian Serbs, but also can be ascribed to the Bosniacs and to the Croats within Bosnia—is economics. Economics and the current standard of living are the No. 1 concerns. Most people are preoccupied with trying to make ends meet. The average salary within the Republika Srpska—if people receive a salary because there's a high level of unemployment; in Banja Luka, the estimate is that 10 percent of the potential work force is employed—the average salary is 60 marks and that is considered to be a very good salary.

Most people have been forced to try to make ends meet through activities such as smuggling, through reliance upon relatives who live abroad to support them with hard currency, and in some rare cases, they've found employment with international organizations which pay better than local employers. But economics are clearly a concern.

Again, tying this into what we see with the growing support for the Dayton Agreement, this is an area which can be built upon. The fact that people across the community divides are interested with economics gives me hope that there is some area where we can build greater cooperation and perhaps base hopes for the future in respect to the relations between these three communities.

Also in respect to the thoughts and the thinking of most Bosnian Serbs, almost across the board there's a high level of insecurity amongst Bosnian Serbs. There is a great skepticism that the war has finally come to an end. Most people see this current period as a cease-fire and they expect the war to resume. There's some very interesting information contained in the USIA survey, and I suggest, since it is now public, that those of you who can obtain a copy should obtain a copy.

In respect to this phenomena, each of the communities were asked if they thought that war could break out again and each of the communities—the Bosniac, the Croat and the Serb—responded in an overwhelming majority that they feared that a war would break out again. Each were asked who would cause the war and interestingly in response, most Croats or most Serbs thought it would be the Bosniacs, the Muslims; most Bosniacs thought that it would be the Croats; and most Croats in the survey thought that it would be the Bosniacs.

So there's a great deal of apprehension and anxiety in respect to the future. But at the same time that there's this fear of a new outbreak of hostility, there is also a tiredness of the war. People are truly tired of the war. Most of these people have lost family members, have lost everything that they've owned in one way or the other, and all of them have an interest in seeing the war end. The problem is, because of this remaining insecurity, it is very difficult for them to completely trust in the peace that is being arranged at this current time under the framework of the Dayton Agreement.

In respect to the elections, I've already mentioned in my comments that I thought that

the Socialists, although they're near in the polls, really do not pose a serious challenge to the SDS, and I really base this on something that happened in 1990 in Bosnia, where I traveled throughout Bosnia before the elections in 1990 and spoke to dozens of people and most of the people I spoke with told me that they were supporters of the Reform Party of Ante Markovic, that they would vote for Ante Markovic and his party. When the election was held and I came back to Bosnia shortly after the elections and spoke to the same people, I asked them who they voted for, and most of the people who had told me that they would vote for Ante Markovic voted for their own ethnic party. When I asked them why that was, why did they tell me they were going to vote for the reformist and then change their mind and vote for the National parties, they told me, "Well, I knew how I would vote, but I didn't know how they were going to vote." There was this fear of dividing the National vote, of undermining national security.

I think going into these elections in September, that the same fear will prevail when it comes time to fill the ballot or to mark the ballot. I see this already in the headlines in some Bosniac media in which banner headlines state, will the Bosniacs be the only foolish ones to divide their vote or to give themselves the multi-pluralism. I think it is a deeply rooted fear and it is an understandable fear and that any attempt to try to influence the elections, that if people are thinking in those terms, has to first and foremost deal with this fear that it will drive people to vote for the party that they feel best able to protect their national interests.

In conclusion, a major swing in political power in Pale to Banja Luka is highly unlikely in the near future. The clumsy attempts by Carl Bildt to exploit the tactical differences between Karadzic and Kasagic have served to solidify the position of the SDS as the sole political power in the Republika Srpska. The international community should not waste its limited time in going through the military success of IFOR's mission in trying to create an artificial alternative to the SDS. Instead, it should try to convince the Bosnian Serb people that they are better off cooperating with the international community and the Bosniac and Croat neighbors. This can only be done through economic assistance and an even-handed approach in supplying humanitarian assistance to refugees and civilians.

A recent USAID assessment mission to Bosnia found that the current greatest humanitarian need in Bosnia was among the Serbian refugees in the Republika Srpska. But nonetheless, the Republika Srpska receives less than one-fourth of all assistance sent to Bosnia. This type of biased assistance tends to support the natural suspicions and anxieties of most Serbs, and it helps give credence to the political platform of the SDS.

All remaining territorial issues of dispute such as Brcko, Gorazde, Mostar, and to some small extent, Sarajevo, should be resolved through negotiations during the presence of IFOR. If they remain unresolved, they undermine the feelings of individual security of people and serve to push the people toward political parties who are committed to a nationalist agenda. For Banja Luka, Brcko is extremely important. Any indication that the town may change hands is seen as a direct security threat to Banja Luka itself, once again forcing people into the arms of the SDS.

I would also say that it is also very important, if there is a hope to rebuild a multi-ethnic, multi-confessional coexistence among these people, to concentrate our assistance efforts on the people who remained in communities where they are now a minority with their rights severely restricted and with conditions so difficult for everybody, let alone these minority groups, that it is very difficult to foresee them staying there in the near future.

But it is very important to try to provide as much assistance, humanitarian assistance

as well as political support, for these small communities of people who find themselves, for lack of a better term, on the other side of the dividing line. There has been a great deal of attention placed on the hopes of sending people back, but it is very difficult to see how this effectively will work if the people who remained in these communities throughout the war disappear. So, I see the remaining communities within both the Republika Srpska and the federation of these minority groups as being the building blocks for the future, hopeful and possible, multi-ethnic and multi-concessional coexistence.

Thank you.

Mr. Wise. Thank you, Mr. Kesic, very much.

Now Ms. Paul, please.

Ms. Paul. Thank you. I would like to thank the distinguished members of the Commission for having me here today to talk about a subject which has captured my attention for some time, Banja Luka. I'm especially honored to present alongside Bishop Franjo Komarica, a man I greatly respect and someone I have often thought of as not unlike Romero in El Salvador, in his courage and unwavering fight for human rights.

I do not say that lightly. Bishop Komarica has endured incredible hardships over the past 4 years and has been forced to watch as his people, his churches, and his clergy were systematically attacked. In all that time, he has never uttered a word against the Serb people themselves, but has directed his appeals for reason to those responsible for carrying out policies against non-Serbs.

He spoke not only for his own ethnic group, but for Muslims and for ordinary Serbs who are suffering because of the war. Were it not for Bishop Komarica, I doubt that the mufti of Banja Luka would be alive today. Throughout the war, Bishop Komarica stayed the course despite abandonment by the international community and the seemingly hopeless situation. He is now faced with rebuilding a broken community and I hope that you'll do everything in your power to help him.

After a long period where foreign journalists and others were not welcome, Banja Luka has become a vastly different city, open to the press, open to change. International visitors today may be taken in by the pleasant avenues and the apparent calm which United Nations protection officer Louis Gentile, a dear friend, once referred to as the seduction of normality.

Louie recalled later his experiences in Banja Luka. Although I was familiar with the sounds of battle, I was surprised during my first night in Banja Luka to hear the explosions of hand grenades and dynamite and frequent automatic weapons fire. There had never been any war activity in the area. I was hearing the sounds I would hear for months to come, the sound of attack on unarmed civilians, their homes and their places of worship.

With daylight would come the impression that the explosions in the night were only a nightmare. The town of Banja Luka seemed so peaceful and pleasant, sidewalk cafes inviting, civilian and military authorities smiling and polite. It would have been so easy if we had only shut our eyes to the terror of an almost invisible minority.

My own first visit to Banja Luka in 1994 ended with Banja Luka's mayor, Radic, informing me that although I had entered illegally, he had decided to allow me to leave. On that visit, I met some of the most frightened and desperate people I've ever come across, and the images of their faces remain with me to this day. I saw the places where the mosques once stood and having worked with Holocaust survivors in the past, the significance of their destruction, like the synagogues destroyed in World War II, was clear. Ironically, a tourist sign

pointing to the location of their Hadia Pasha [sp] mosque, a 400-year-old cultural treasure, remained.

My last visit in April 1996 was deeply disturbing as well, for I found a city newly populated with internationals who seemed to have little concept of the horrors which had happened there. It was as if the past had never happened, as if the Dayton Agreement was the beginning of time.

The hundreds of elderly people mercilessly murdered in their own houses, the men hiding in the woods in the dead of winter to escape being press-ganged, the mothers and children physically evicted from their houses, the humiliated university professors forced to sweep the streets, the disappeared priests, the imprisoned leaders of decimated communities, all of these events were swept away.

It is hard to describe the constant terror that Muslims and Croats endured for almost 4 years in Banja Luka. Banja Luka has been referred to as the heart of darkness and the worst place in Bosnia in terms of human rights abuses by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Yet, there were no battles waged in Banja Luka and there was no armed resistance by the non-Serb population.

When I think of the deeds committed in Banja Luka by nationalist Serbs determined to create an ethnically pure republican Bosnia, Hanna Arendt's reference to the banality of evil often comes to mind. While the ethnic cleansing of non-Serbs conducted in and around Banja Luka was often accompanied by violence and terror, an efficient bureaucracy was established to justify and carry out the policies of the Bosnian Serb leadership in a more orderly manner.

The methods used, which could be described as a form of low-intensity warfare, decimated the Muslim and Croat communities and resulted in many deaths and untold suffering and millions of dollars worth of cash and property were robbed from the non-Serbs of the region. This is an issue that's not often discussed, what happened to those millions of deutsche marks.

As Nicholas Morris, the former UNHCR special envoy for the former Yugoslavia, stated after a visit to Banja Luka in December of '93, it is apparent that the Banja Luka authorities want not only to cleanse the area of all minorities, but to erase any trace that they ever lived here.

I'm here today because I believe that those who planned and carried out these policies from the safety of their offices are just as culpable, if not more so, than those they incited to murder, rape and torture innocent people. But they have got away with it. Some of them are now almost unbelievably touted as moderates by U.S. Government representatives and officials like the high representative for the Dayton Agreement, Carl Bildt, who are desperate to find alternatives to the leadership of Radovan Karadzic.

I would question the logic of assuming that anyone who opposes Karadzic must be a moderate. The wartime activities and connections of so-called moderates and the company that they still keep speak louder than their sudden rebirth as people who espouse democratic principles.

Since '92, non-Serbs in Banja Luka and the surrounding smaller towns and villages have been murdered, tortured, raped, and beaten. They have been fired from their jobs, denied medical care, intimidated, harassed. Their legally owned businesses and properties, houses, have been confiscated and their places of worship destroyed. Muslim and Croat men

were taken from their homes in the middle of the night or kidnapped off the street in the light of day and taken to forced labor camps.

Their families often had no idea where they had been taken. Men spent months hiding in the woods, even in the dead of winter, or sleeping in a different house every night hoping to escape the inevitable knock at the door. Those taken for forced labor to the front lines were forced to dig trenches in the line of fire and many died.

The international community placidly accepted the ethnic cleansing of Bosnian Serb territory as a *fait accompli*. After the concentration camps near Banja Luka and Prijedor were exposed in 1992, the world expressed horror and measures were taken to close the camps. The attention shifted to other areas of Bosnia, but the oppression of non-Serbs in Banja Luka and other towns never stopped, and the camps continued to operate.

1993 saw the destruction of the last of 16 mosques in the Banja Luka town and the destruction of more Roman Catholic churches. 1994 was equally hard and oppression intensified on those who insisted on remaining. In 1995, following Croatian expenses in Slavonia and in the Croatian Krajina, an ethnic cleansing end game was carried out with more than 25,000 expelled, mostly from Banja Luka, between August and October.

Those who wanted to leave had to visit numerous municipal offices and pay fees at each one during certain periods. The fees and the rules and regulations changed all the time, and here again, I'm talking about the finality of evil. It was necessary to go to numerous municipal offices for telephones, electricity, to the bank to certify that you didn't owe them anything each time you went and obtain a receipt so that you would be permitted to be ethnically cleansed.

The worst part for men involved going to the ministry of defense to get a document that released them from military service because you might just be taken away there and then leaving your family desperate and with no way to leave. The housing commission required you to certify that you didn't own any property. Even if you did, you signed your rights away in order to be permitted to leave, and the price for release varied.

During some periods, it could cost thousands of German marks to get a family out. Imagine one refugee told Human Rights Watch, we had to pay them in order to transfer all our possessions to them. They paid to be ethnically cleansed. As a final outrage, people often had to pay the so-called Serb Red Cross—which by the way, is run by Liljana Karadzic, the wife of Radovan Karadzic—large sums of money for transportation to the border.

In May 1995, an official survey of all the property of non-Serbs was conducted in Banja Luka and other towns very systematically in a final attempt to identify and confiscate any assets left in non-Serb hands. I have with me today a copy of that document which you can see afterward if you would like.

In September, October of 1995, special forces under the command of Arkan were called in by the Bosnian Serb authorities. The final phase of ethnic cleansing ended with an estimated 2,000 men brutally separated from their families and sent to forced labor or detention camps. Many people were brutally killed. There's a confirmed mass grave outside of Sasina [sp] containing at least two busloads full of people killed on the night of September 21–22, and there were women among the group, and yet there's been very little attention to this event which occurred, I remind you, after Srebrenica.

What happened in Banja Luka cannot be separated from the policies carried out by Bosnian Serb authorities throughout the territory they controlled. The transfers of prisoners

from camp to camp, prison to prison, the sharing of forced labor, the similar bureaucratic procedures all demonstrate linkages.

Some have estimated there are fewer than 15,000 non-Serbs remaining in a region which once boasted non-Serb populations of over 500,000 people. In Banja Luka, before the war, almost 60,000 non-Serbs lived in the city and today there are only a few thousand left. Less than 10 percent of the non-Serb community remains.

While conditions in Banja Luka have improved since the war ended, the situation remains tense and it is still not possible for non-Serbs to live normally. Evictions of non-Serbs from their houses have continued and Human Rights Watch has information that in direct violation of the Dayton Agreement, there are still dozens of people being held in forced labor referred to as working obligation by the Bosnian Serb authorities.

We also have reason to believe that some people are still imprisoned, among them Father Tomas Loftonovic [sp], a Catholic priest from Prijedor, and his parents, and Nedim Filipovic [sp], head of the Muslim charity, Met Hamid [sp] from Kljuc, rumored to be imprisoned in Banja Luka.

Non-Serbs in Banja Luka have little chance of being employed or of participating in political life in any meaningful way. They still live in fear. While the presence of internationals provides some protection, they know that if they leave before there's progress in human rights, the Serbs will finish the job that they set out to do.

I'd like to give you a sense of some of the people in Banja Luka, a short, if you will, who is who, and I wanted to talk about the mayor, Fedor Radic, who is often touted as a liberal in the press today. Radic has been mayor of Banja Luka since the elections held in 1990 and as mayor, has continually denied having any information about ethnic cleansing, the destruction of mosques or churches in his own town, and other persecution of non-Serbs in Banja Luka.

I've interviewed leaders within the Bosniac and Croat community in Banja Luka, all of whom are tremendously disappointed in Radic, whom they viewed once as someone who might represent all citizens of Banja Luka. The opinion now is that he was very involved in the development and implementation of policies designed to drive non-Serbs from the region, but he's always managed to say the right things to members of the international community and has avoided saying too many things against non-Serbs in public forums.

In 1995, however, he personally telephoned one of the leaders of the Croat community in Banja Luka telling him that every last Croat, including him, would have to leave. During that time, by the way, Radic's son was attending university here in the United States.

Representatives of the Muslim community met with Radic many times during the war to ask his assistance, but although he promised to help them, he never protected anyone, nor did he protest the treatment of non-Serbs. He told them that Serbs and areas under Muslim control were, after all, in danger and that he would arrange for "the humane exchange of persons."

He promised to help the Muslim community in repairing damaged mosques, but he inferred behind the scenes that this would never happen, and a few weeks after promising his help, the last mosque remaining in Banja Luka was destroyed. In February, U.S. Government officials were prevented from meeting with Radic by the Pale authorities and they expressed their displeasure openly. It was obvious that Radic had been selected as an acceptable alternative to Karadzic and other hard-liners.

On May 28th, the possible ouster of Radic as the mayor of Banja Luka was predicted. It was rumored that he would be replaced by hard-liner Savo Chuk [sp], director of the water management company in Banja Luka. But Radic so far has managed to fend off the pack.

If one can be judged by the company one keeps, then Radic's position is made more clear. He recently announced that he would run in the elections as leader of the newly formed Democratic National Bloc, which encompasses the People's Party, also sometimes called the National Party of Radoslav Brcanin [sp], the radical party of Nicola Pasic [sp], headed by Dubravka Gustejevic [sp], the Serb Patriotic Party headed by Zhukinin [sp], and the Democratic Center.

Two of these parties are extreme right-wing parties which support the SDS and have leaders who are directly involved with or supported the persecution of non-Serbs. Brcanin's People's Party's policies do not deliver very much from other recently emerged nationalist parties according to European monitors and claim close ties with Serbia and good relations with the SDS. By their own admission, the party members state that their views are closest to SDS.

They claim to accept Dayton and pledge to cooperate with other parties against war and for a united Republika Srpska. Just a note about Radoslav Brcanin. He was formerly minister of city planning and urbanism for Republika Srpska and former member of so-called Serb Assembly during the war. He was the unofficial, although official sanctioned, propaganda minister for the Republika Srpska. He was a primary figure in the ethnic cleansing operations conducted in Banja Luka and throughout the Bosanska Krajina.

He was director of Banja Luka television and spoke many times in the media about the need to "clean" the region of non-Serbs. He said that no more than 2,000 elderly Muslims should remain in Banja Luka, about 3 percent, "only enough to clean our streets and clean our shoes." Likewise, he stated that only 7,000 ethnic Albanians should be permitted to remain in Kosovo.

He often incited violence against non-Serbs and it is believed that he received orders directly from Karadzic. It is believed that he gave instructions to the city planner for Banja Luka, to civil police and to local paramilitaries on how to conduct ethnic cleansing operations.

A word about Rajko Kasagic, recently ousted as prime minister: There was a lot of concern expressed by Carl Bildt and the United States bishop and others about the ouster of Kasagic and he is assumed again to be a moderate. However, he was recently president of the executive board of a municipality of Banja Luka and was responsible for expulsions of non-Serbs from apartments and houses and for confiscation of property and businesses owned by non-Serbs.

He issued the orders to directors of companies to fire people from their jobs and then to take their apartments. He worked very closely with Brcanin and was often in the media supporting the same message.

An interview conducted by Human Rights Watch in '94 gives a specific example of Kasagic's role. A woman told a Human Rights representative, in June 1993, I got kicked out of my house. Someone in the town council sent people with a truck to my house to take all my possessions. A wife of the man who wanted to take my house hit the wall of my house and said this is mine. Rajko Kasagic had signed the permit allowing them to occupy my apartment.

An interview conducted recently by OSCE monitors of a Bosniac woman in Banja Luka whose business was confiscated produced a document also signed by Kasagic giving ownership of her cafe to the local basketball club. Kasagic stated in an interview with a Serbian newspaper in October 1995 that the district government in Banja Luka demonstrated that it is possible to replace officials in state-owned companies whose performance was not satisfactory.

“I will fight against resistance to dismissals if the authorities establish that a civilian is culpable regardless of what he might be responsible for. We’ll just have to appoint people who can work better.” And he continued, “The greatest contribution to this state would be to keep the criminals in jail.”

“Once the peace holds,” the interviewer assures the reader, “Kasagic will work for stronger ties with Mother Serbia and Yugoslavia,” and the writer states, “The trust implied in his appointment to the highest office in government is the best indicator of his personal loyalty to Karadzic.” One Bosniac man exile said that the difference between Kasagic and Karadzic is height and the color of their eyes.

There are a number of recommendations that can be made and also a number of major problems that are likely to arise in the next month. I would like to again, before I begin talking about the recommendations, raise the case of Father Tomas Loftonovic [sp] because he must not be forgotten. Arrested in August in Prijedor, he disappeared with his parents in September. He’s about 34 years old. He’s known for his outspokenness, sometimes perhaps he was a little bit too outspoken because he spoke up for human rights for Muslims and Croats and Serbs and everyone.

He often spoke up to the authorities directly. There’s a linkage to Banja Luka because he is a priest from the Banja Luka diocese and was previously head of Caritas [sp], the Catholic humanitarian agency in Banja Luka. He was rumored to be held in Prijedor, then in Banja Luka, and now again we believe that he’s in Prijedor. We fervently hope that he’s alive, but we’ve been unable to get a straight answer from the Serb authorities.

Radovan Glogovac [sp], the person who is responsible for exchanging human beings for Republika Srpska, and Dragan Davidovic, who is the minister of religion in Pale are believed to know the truth and yet, they’re not speaking. I would like to thank the Commission for its recent efforts on behalf of Father Leftonovic.

There’s several issues and I would like to echo some of the things that Mr. Kesic said, first of all, that Brcko is a very serious issue and one that needs a lot of attention, not in 6 months when the decision will be made, but now. It is very important to begin very intense discussions about the future of Brcko.

Secondly, there’s an issue that’s very important that Mr. Kesic also raised and that’s the issue of Serbs from the Krajina region of Croatia and also, there are Serbs who are from areas in the federation which are not controlled by Croats, namely Dvor, the town of Dvor. These two groups of displaced persons and refugees are very important to the future of Banja Luka. The Krajina Serbs are especially angry and militant. They insist that they want to return to Croatia, and yet, there’s been little movement on Croatia’s part to permit them to return to their homes.

The Krajina Serbs have physically prevented the return of refugees and displaced persons to Bosnian Serb territory and likewise, they have threatened physically to disrupt elections in the future, and I think that they’re fully capable of doing so.

Also, there are no human rights groups in Banja Luka today. An important goal would be the establishment of a human rights group, but it must have strong linkages to the outside for obvious reasons. Anyone involved in human rights work in Banja Luka is at great risk and they would need the protection of those linkages. The group must be multi-ethnic. Also, an ombudsman's office for human rights must be set up as soon as possible in Banja Luka and the resources necessary to fully staff such an office should be provided.

Security issues for the election period must be discussed and plans should be made about how to address security breaches, and this is something that in terms of studying the protection situation in Bosnia for the last several years. It is never ceased to amaze me that very often plans are not made on how problems that can often be foreseen will be dealt with.

It should be made very clear to the authorities that they're expected to prevent attacks on opposition leaders, if there were any, and that there would be serious consequences for their failure to do so. The international community must send a strong message that ethnically oriented national politics are not acceptable. This means that access to the media is critical and that true moderates must be supported and protected.

While Human Rights Watch believes that Carl Bildt has not taken a strong enough stand on the issue of the apprehension of persons indicted for war crimes, freedom of movement, and other rights. He has been correct to attempt to break the isolation of the Bosnian Serb people who approaches to Banja Luka, and again echoing what Mr. Kesic said, the involvement of the international community in extending the hand of friendship to the Serb people is very important. But we warn Mr. Bildt to choose his allies wisely.

Finally, a word about elections. Human Rights Watch does not take the position that the elections should not go forward at this time, but believes that the focus should be on creating the conditions for free and fair elections so that they can go forward. Elections based on current conditions, however, would be a sham. So every effort must be made to ensure human rights, respect for human dignity throughout Bosnia-Herzegovina. Thank you.

Mr. Wise. Thank you, Ms. Paul, and thank you all. I think you've given a very vivid picture of the horrors and the problems facing people of Banja Luka and the people of Bosnia and laid a good basis for our question period. I would ask anyone who has a question to raise their hand and after being recognized, to go to the microphone in the center to present the question because we are transcribing the proceedings today.

I ask that anyone asking a question identify themselves and give any organizational affiliation. Now, who would like to begin the questioning?

Yes, in the back.

Questioner. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm Dr. Jamosic [sp], executive vice president of National Federation of Croatian-Americans.

Your excellency, Bishop Komarica, on behalf of Croatian-Americans, I welcome you and salute you today.

Bishop Komarica. Thank you.

Questioner. I'm very proud that the Croatian people have a person of your quality and your caliber. Your dear mother must be very proud of you, to suffer so much with you under very difficult circumstances. My question to you and to the panel is that in light of this barbaric destruction and carnage that was taking place in your area, it seems that in the later period of the war, the Croatian army had the capability to actually go into Banja Luka and to more or less liberate the Croatian people. Do you think, in your view, this may have

been a wise or prudent decision to go in or to stop as apparently the international community wanted President Tudjman to stop? Thank you.

Bishop Komarica. On this question, if I have to answer this question, I have to ask you for understanding. I'm not competent to answer this. I'm not a politician or a military person nor a statesman here. I am a brother to other people and I care for every life. The people who lead wars, they have to be responsible for their moves. We would like to remain steady in our position, not to endanger anybody's life or anybody's property. That's the end.

Mr. Wise. Thank you. Do either of you want to comment?

Mr. Kesic. I'd just very briefly add that at the time, if you remember when the offensive was occurring, there had already begun to develop some problems of dispute within the cooperating forces, the Havel [sp], the Croatian army, and the army of Bosnia-Herzegovina, the mostly Muslim army. Around Jajce particularly there were several incidents between these forces, and also in the Bihac area there were several incidents.

There was concern within the U.S. Government that at the time of the offensive, that if Croat forces were to enter Banja Luka, that would expedite the conflict between the Bosniacs and the Croats and that it would soon lead to a breakdown of the federation itself over a dispute of territory. So, there was a push, even from Washington, to slow down the military offensive of the Croat forces.

But at the same time, you have to remember that Assistant Secretary of State Holbrook was also in the midst of negotiations with Slobodan Milosevic in Serbia and I think there was a hesitation, especially since the United States had committed itself to a negotiated settlement, for the Europeans, in order to get European support for the use of force in August, at the end of August, beginning of September in the air strike, that there was a hesitancy to derail Holbrook's negotiations as well.

So there were several issues which affected whether or not the Croatian forces could enter the city, and if they entered the city, what would that actually mean in terms of the overall negotiation process.

Mr. Wise. Are there questions?

Questioner. My name is Pamela Taylor from Voice of America. You three seem to be in basic agreement on two things, that the international community should do more to help the Bosnian Serb people and that there's not that great of a difference amongst the various leaders of the Bosnian Serbs. So my question is twofold.

How does the international community extend its hand to the Bosnian Serb people without extending its hand to the Bosnian Serb leadership that exists currently? Ms. Paul said that we should be encouraging more moderate leaders, so my question is, who might they be? You've told us who isn't.

Mr. Wise. Would you like to lead off, Ms. Paul?

Ms. Paul. OK, I'd be happy to. I think there are a number of ways to extend a hand. One is to support democracy building efforts on human rights efforts within the Republika Srpska as much as possible. One pvery important issue is the issue of free access to the media, so supporting independent media through things as mundane as providing newsprint to newspapers struggling to survive and ensuring that there's a television station and radio station that's accessible to everyone. In Banja Luka, for example, it is a very critical issue.

There are two persons in Banja Luka that I think could be regarded as particularly moderate.

One of those persons is Miograd Givanovic [sp], the Social Liberal Party. The party is quite well-organized and they've managed to retain, although albeit tenuous links, at least some links with liberals in Sarajevo and Tuzla, and some connections with liberals outside former Yugoslavia, for example, the young liberals in Sweden. They are very much outspoken about the issue of Bosnia, the future of Bosnia as a multi-ethnic society which naturally makes them quite unusual in Republika Srpska. During the war, the leaders of the party were mobilized by the army and discouraged from voicing opposition to ethnic cleansing policies, et cetera. The party places an emphasis on human rights and is one of the two parties that are all supported by non-Serbs, and as Bishop Komarica pointed out, non-Serbs in the region really have no political voice. They also have a strong emphasis or a focus on reconstruction and rebuilding of the economy through linkages with foreign business, which is, of course, a very positive view.

The other party is the Independent Social Democrats with the leadership by Miroslav Dodic [sp] and they also place strong emphasis on human rights and «MD30» cooperation, in fact, with the tribunal in the Hague.

So those are two parties. There are some other parties which are viewed more or less as being in the center, but again, one has to be careful because the parties to the right, some of them have shifted a little bit toward the center, but it doesn't mean that their views are necessarily moderate. But those two people, and, of course, while we don't, in Human Rights Watch, of course, support any particular candidates, we are very interested in political parties which do speak to the issue of human rights for everyone.

Now, there are some moderate groups in Banja Luka which are, although they seem on the surface to be somewhat open and moderate, when you scratch a little bit deeper, you find that there are some problems. For example, there's the Serb Forum of Intellectuals led by Mladon Ivanic [sp] who has stated, in fact, that there's a threshold of a 20 percent non-Serb minority that was acceptable in Banja Luka. Only as long, by the way, as those people stayed under Serb control.

The forum seems to take a very strong stand on human rights issues, but their views are always stated in a more or less negative way in the sense that well, if the rights of Serbs and others in the federation territory are respected, then perhaps Serbs here can respect the rights of non-Serbs. So one always has to consider how they're putting things.

They also view the indictments of Karadzic and Mladic the arming of the federation and the failure of the international community to protect the Serbs of Sarajevo—and in fact, in that case, I think they do have a point—as evidence that the international community is more or less plotting against them.

So where Mr. Kesic was speaking previously, there is this climate of fear and this perception that these events taking place within the international community and the federation are somehow threatening the Serb people. But the threat of Serbs as victims rather than aggressors runs through most of their rhetoric.

There are many parties, in fact, there's more than two dozen parties in the Republika Srpska and it will really make your head spin to try and figure out who they all are and what they're doing. In fact, there are actually very few parties that are viewed by the European community and OSCE as being politically viable parties for the long term. So I just wanted to mention a couple.

Mr. Wise. Does the bishop have a comment?

Bishop Komarica. I would like to thank you for your truthful tragic situation in—tragic situation in Banja Luka. This is truly true the way you expect it. This is not all. You cannot describe every single offense or situation of all the horrible things that have happened, what has happened to completely innocent people.

Permit me to just an observation that you mentioned on the end of yours, that if Serbs rights would be respected in other areas, then the non-Serb people will be more tolerated in Banja Luka. About human rights of universal meaning, there is no need for discussion. Those who are interested for human rights have to defend those under all circumstances in every situation.

I would like to ask all of you to consider all the consequences. You have to be aware that the Serb leadership in that part of Bosnia wanted to create completely ethnic clean territory. One of the leaders of Serbs has personally, ultimately has requested that I help with my influence over Croatian people, that I would recommend that all the Serbs would leave Mostar.

I have rejected this and I have asked for him not to expect from me to be a criminal or involved in it. I have said if I can do anything with politicians from the Croatian side, then I would ask from them to protect all the human rights for all the Serbs in Mostar and in Herzegovina and everywhere where those rights have been denied or taken away.

In other words, it is evident that the different politicians of Serbian people in Bosnia, they have made their people in almost enormous evil. I ask you that you help all those who have been deprived, without conditions, especially without any kind of reciprocal conditions. All these people should receive basic human rights.

Mr. Wise. I would just announce that our chairman has joined us, Mr. Smith. Glad you could come. Please come up if you will. The chairman of the Commission. Would you like to say anything?

Mr. Smith. Just to welcome the bishop to our Helsinki briefing. I apologize for being late. I had to testify myself on a human rights issue in China and we also had a full committee hearing on the upcoming elections in Bosnia that I also had to participate in. But I just want to say that we had, our Commission, myself, and others had requested to go to Banja Luka and were denied by our own State Department the opportunity to do so because we do want to be as helpful as we can, and know that our concerns are with you and I look forward to looking at your statement and, you know, fully briefed as to your comments. Thank you so much for spending the time here.

Mr. Wise. Mr. Kesic, did you want to say a word?

Mr. Kesic. I wanted to, just for a second, come back to Pam Taylor's question in respect to how to help the people without helping the leaders. Really it is a Catch22 situation. There's really no way of separating the people from the leadership to the extent that we would like to see some kind of sanitized corridor between the two.

In reality, even humanitarian assistance helps the leadership because it is one less concern for the political leadership in respect to trying to deal with the problems that beset them. But I think that we cannot make a political issue of basic humanitarian needs of any of the people; that it is important that when people are in need, especially when the need is in respect to access to food, that assistance be provided regardless of the benefits that might incur to the political leadership in not having to deal with this question.

Secondly, I think that in trying to direct our efforts to affect the average person in contrast to the political leadership, I think first of all it is important to show that the interna-

tional community and in particular, the government of the United States, is concerned across the board for the situation, not only the humanitarian situation of all of the people, but also the situation of human rights across the board.

So, although I also agree with the bishop that there cannot be a reciprocal linkage between the respect for human rights, there does have to be at least in respect to perception of the Serbs, not only in Banja Luka, but throughout the Republika Srpska, that the international community is making a gesture in good faith; that they're not, as Ms. Paul has suggested, playing to some kind of broader conspiracy against the Serb people.

I come back to the point that as long as the insecurity and the fear and the anxiety over the future influence public discourse and political debate within the Republika Srpska, it is very difficult to envision some kind of democratic progress being made or some kind of new alternative democratic institutions springing up.

But I also think that we have to look long term. We have to be concerned with the immediate short-term conditions, especially in respect to human rights, but in relationship to the region as a whole, to the relationship between the three communities, we have to base our hopes on the long-term prospects for improving those relations and improving stability within the region.

There, I think that there are some practical things that can be done. One of the things is to play to the stated desire of the Bosnian Serb leadership to privatize and introduce free market. Now, we can dismiss them as being only lip service and playing to the West, but I think it is important to put them to the test and to really push them on this issue.

I think that we can all agree that free markets will bring openness and will bring, to some extent, an open public discourse. So I think in this area, we shouldn't debate whether or not we should assist in the transformation of the economy.

Secondly, I think that it is very important to work with the indigenous NGOs. Ms. Paul mentioned the Intellectual Forum. I'm a little less pessimistic about the Forum, I think—only because the Forum is really made up of diverse groups, diverse individuals whose political affiliations vary. So you have people, even from Jevanovic's [sp] group as members of the forum, but you also have people from the SDS and from the Socialists also members of the forum.

There's probably a likelihood that the forum is going to split because of this political division, but nonetheless, the forum has been the sole vehicle in Banja Luka and, I would argue, even in other areas of the Republika Srpska, for opening or taking the first steps to beginning of public discourse on such issues as human rights, on the rights of minorities, the role of the international community, the Serb perception of the international community, and it is done at a time that is very sensitive and delicate.

So, I think that the criticisms that Ms. Paul has leveled against the forum are valid, but I also think that these people have really tried to take an important step and it is only natural that it is very difficult for them to really make large strides given the fear that prevails.

Mr. Wise. Other questions? The gentleman in the back there.

Questioner. Thank you, sir. I have——

Mr. Wise. Would you identify yourself, please?

Questioner. My name is Hamdi Tiboravakan [sp] from Banja Luka, and I had three questions, one for each of the panelists. Can I tell them all and if they would answer all of

them.

Mr. Wise. All right.

Questioner. Thank you.

Bishop Komarica, I am honored to meet you here. I hope that some day on this painful journey toward democracy in Banja Luka, all true democrats will be the winners some day. I've been in touch with many people from Banja Luka in the last 5 years, so I'll talk to you later. OK.

My question for Ms. Paul is, my mother is 70 years old, very religious, a religious Muslim. She cannot wear her Muslim clothes—that's her identity—not anymore. How would a Texan feel if he suddenly cannot wear his cowboy hat? Is that some new law or something new, but to me, it is also the news.

For Mr. Kesic, Banja Luka is a town established by Muslims originally. All historians know that. It is the center of Bosnian Krajina region which is much more known than Krajina region in Croatia. Why does the news media, especially international news media, ignore the meaning of Banja Luka to the Bosnian Krajina region and to the Bosnian Muslims otherwise? Banja Luka, without Muslims, free Muslims, and all other democrats in Banja Luka, is simply not Bosnia. Simply, Banja Luka is very important to Bosnian Muslims as well to other people, but Bosnia without free Banja Luka is not Bosnia. Let's make it clear.

Again, to you, Bishop Komarica, if you would be kind to say something about tampering with elections on the part of Serbs in 1990. I know some people used to vote in two places and then the negotiations that took part around Kotovaros [sp] in the fall of '92, my brother, his wife's brother actually, got killed up there.

Serbs clearly made the threats with certain death to all those Bosnian fighters. Do they surrender or get captured? One way or other, they'll be dead. So many people were afraid to surrender or negotiate on their attempts to reach central Bosnia. One hundred and sixty people are still missing. So if you would later on elaborate on that a little bit, please? Thank you.

Mr. Wise. All right. Let's begin in the order that the questions were asked. Ms. Paul, if you'll begin?

Ms. Paul. I just wanted to say that I'm sorry to hear about your mother's situation in that the pride of the elderly in Banja Luka has been particularly difficult, especially for minority elderly who often have been the subject of harassment and attacks, have been thrown out of their homes, have been murdered, elderly women who have been raped, and all these things have gone on for all these years without anyone stopping them, without anyone protecting them.

I think it is very important to recognize the fact that there are still non-Serbs remaining in Banja Luka. The campaign of ethnic cleansing was not successful thanks to the leadership of Bishop Komarica and the mufti of Banja Luka, Grabnin Halilovic [sp], and others who have stayed, who vowed to stay no matter what to support their people, and that it is extremely important not to forget the people that have endured so much and have remained at Banja Luka and to focus constantly on human rights in Banja Luka to make sure that we're aware of what's happening there.

God forbid there should be renewed conflict at some point in the future, but if there is or if the hard-line leadership succeeds in maintaining its place, then minorities in Banja Luka and throughout Bosanska Krajina will continue to be at risk. The ethnic cleansing has not

stopped. There's still evictions going on. In the town of Teslic [sp] recently more than 200 Bosniacs have been evicted from their homes and villages around Teslic through a campaign similar to what I described happening in Banja Luka.

There's also a group of six to eight—eight actually, Bosnian villages around in what's called the Sopna Sam [sp] near Zvornik containing about 4,000 people who are very frightened, and I think they're also at risk of being forced to leave the region.

Then finally, as Mr. Kesic mentioned, the right to remain. At Human Rights Watch, we feel very strongly that there's one serious problem with the Dayton Agreement and that's the words "right to remain" do not appear in the agreement. All the focus, all the rhetoric has been focused on the right to return, but not the protection of minority communities in Banja Luka and west Mostar and in Sarajevo where Serbs today are being evicted forcibly from their houses still.

So it is very important to keep focus on those minority communities and to protect the right to remain, and we have, in fact, called on NATO, on IFOR forces, and on the international police task force to take a much stronger role, to increase their presence, for example, in the villages around Teslic in the southwest Sopna [sp] region and in other areas to prevent further ethnic cleansing from being carried out.

Mr. Wise. Mr. Kesic?

Mr. Kesic. A really accurate response and detailed response to your question would take several hours in respect to the international media and how it is covered the conflict throughout the former Yugoslavia. But I think that three basic rules apply. One is to simplify the story and one Krajina is enough in terms of trying to understand what's happening, at least for editors, especially those sitting in offices in New York or Washington. So, I know.

Even I've interviewed a reporter who was trying to make that distinction between Krajina and Bosnian Krajina and the editor said, well, what does this mean? This is the same place. Then as the reporter tried to explain, just said simply, don't use the word Krajina because it will confuse the readers. Just drop it completely. So, it is an effort to simplify.

Secondly, the media for the most part concentrated on Sarajevo and the situation in Sarajevo, and this was also natural because the facilities for transmitting, especially the electronic media, were more suitable in Sarajevo than in other cities and towns throughout Bosnia, and this concentration on Sarajevo almost totally excluded what was happening throughout the rest of the country.

So that on many occasions, it seemed as though that what was happening in Sarajevo was characteristic of what was happening throughout the country, and in some areas, it was much worse and in some areas, it was much better, especially in respect to cooperation between the various communities or even hostilities between the various communities. So, the obsession and the focus with Sarajevo determined how the Bosnian Krajina would be covered, as it did everything else.

The third explanation and probably an inadequate explanation at that is that the reporters themselves really didn't understand the distinction of the Bosnian Krajina, what was the Bosnian Krajina, what is the Bosnian Krajina, how does it differ from the Krajina in Croatia, and they themselves couldn't come to grips with this, and so they decided that for their own sake of clarity and in trying to convey the story, that they would just simplify it and that's what happened.

Mr. Wise. Bishop?

Bishop Komarica. I would like to answer these questions. In regards to elections, I really fear manipulation. If serious part of implementation of Dayton Agreement is sound, if this implementation will go as far as it is going now, the elections will not be normal. The behavior of IFOR so far, the behavior of IFOR is really supporting ethnic cleansing more than supporting the Dayton Agreement.

We can expect more credibility from the signers of the Dayton Agreement. In regard to all the refugees from the region of Banja Luka, all these people who have been pushed out are completely innocent people who have not done any harm. The difference might be a slight difference in case of Mostar or Sarajevo.

I would like to express an opinion of these refugees and these people who have lost. They feel punished by the contact group, by all the major players in this situation. They're supposed to return to the places, to the people who basically took their rights in the first place. They are returning to your attacker.

This is a hypocrisy of the international politics. These people have a reasonable fear to return to their homes and if they don't return, the international community will say, "Well, we have tried to secure your return and you didn't take this opportunity." I ask you, would you return if you would be like a lamb into the wolf's domain?

I would like to state that we are not as silly as we might be thought of. Despite this very comic tragic situation, I still hope and support and expect that all the people, my people, are willing to return and cooperate in a peaceful way. We are ready for forgiveness and reconciliation, but we also expect from other side where we are asking for reconciliation that they also extend their hand.

I hope that we are not expecting the impossible. However, as long as the leaders of this side are extreme politicians and as long as these different parties with extreme positions have a chance to be elected and receive votes, then the peace will be endangered in this region and in the entire Bosnia. I expect from democratic media and some American people that exists under respect of the principles on which our civilization is based—this is the first of all respect for basic human rights as I mentioned. Any party or any politician who is not willing to include us should be—any politician who is not willing to include us in their program should be suspended from the elections. Otherwise, everybody is bringing their credibility into question who are trying to produce some quality peace in Bosnia.

The real source of evil has to be named and against that evil you have to apply specific measures. We expect this from the people who claim to be democratic and peace-loving people and who—we expect this from the people who claim that they've tried to enforce that kind of credible peace. As long as we who are in Banja Luka cannot go to our homes, and these houses might be one kilometer or three kilometers away from the place of living now, and if we are not allowed to do this, then every election is really a farce and it is really a ridiculous situation.

How long my mother, 80 years old, will need to return to her native home from which she was pushed out by official representatives of the city of Banja Luka, who came with a knife and if you are not leaving in 5 minutes, I will kill you. Is there a human being behind that mayor or that official who can do such an evil deed especially when he knows that these people are completely innocent and have not done any wrong?

The quoted Mr. Radic specifically has expressed to the representative of European Parliament in the assembly last year. The member of the parliament asked what these Croatians

have done so wrong that about 80 of them have been killed in Banja Luka specifically and more than quite a few thousand forcefully pushed out. He answered, Radic answered, that Croats in his city have not done anything wrong.

His truthful statement is true. Therefore, somebody has to carry the consequences. I will make sure as the bishop that all my priests that we, through all our work, we will make sure that we are trying to do only good to all the people that we meet.

Together with the representative of Serbian Orthodox Church Episkop Efranam [sp] and with the Muslim representative, Halilovic, since 1992 I and these people have made six appeals together to different religious—if somebody is interested, you can receive these copies of our common approach to a peaceful situation. I would like to thank God that people have listened to him, and especially Catholics in his area, together with other bishops and Catholics in Bosnia.

In a significant number of our statements in the last 4 years, we have indicated and we have stressed consistently basic principles and basic needs for human rights and basic cultural heritage, protection of undeniable human rights for all the people in Bosnia regardless of their nationality or their faith. We have raised our voice against every evil regardless of who did it and where it happened. If you are interested, you can receive a copy to see what the Catholic Church has done in this area.

After the Dayton Agreement, the Dayton Agreement which is in many ways, in our eyes, quite unjust for the Catholic community in Bosnia and Herzegovina. My diocese is completely destroyed, my diocese in the northwestern part of Bosnia. This is my diocese that looks with all the places of churches and convents and monasteries and this is how it looks right now.

This is what I call ethnic cleansing or genocide or “cultural-cide”—or ethnic cleansing. In this territory, there was no war, and despite this, all the churches have been destroyed or extremely damaged, and I can mention also all the Muslim places of worship. This is Banja Luka. There was no war in this area and there is lots of evil there. Incredible destruction from the people who basically themselves are ruining themselves. It is not that I wanted to judge anyone. I wanted to forgive and to pray for everyone and that all—to help all to affirm in themselves their own human identity and being and this is what happened to our religious, that here is at work a real destruction of faith and God and good in this society, in this particular area.

It is no doubt that communist atheism has destroyed the souls of many of our contemporaries and this kind of a view has confirmed Serbian Orthodox Episkop Efranam. The responsible representative of one religious group, together with the rest of the bishops in Bosnia and Herzegovina, we have published a letter in January of this year after documentation of all the tragic happenings in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

It suggests to all faithful and to all the people of goodwill what we as people and believers should do to assure peace and reconciliation in this land. We are convinced that the individual believers are called to be actors and to save all these basic human rights. That is protection, to protect human dignity and basic human rights.

I am convinced that in our position, we are not alone and that all those who have in their heart or on their heart that they will support us in our effort to do all possible to contribute to this peace in this area. I hope that this contact with you today was not lost or is not without fruit. I thank you very much.

Mr. Wise. Thank you very much, Bishop. That was a very impressive and moving statement. I think it would be a note on which to end our briefing. We're already some minutes past our time. I would ask our other panelists if they have any final things they would like to say at this point. If not, I will close. All right. They also think it is fitting that we end on the note that the bishop has left with us.

Thank you all for coming. I think this has been one of our best briefings that we've had in a long time and I think we all go away with a much better understanding of the situation in Banja Luka. Thank you.

[Whereupon at 2:00 p.m., the Commission adjourned.]