

The Yugoslav conflicts which began in the early 1990s and continued with intermittent lulls up until last year have had a tumultuous impact on the development of post-Cold War Europe and a traumatic impact on the lives of millions.

The forced displacement and the atrocities which occurred on a massive scale exposed the flaws in several international bodies, including the United Nations and the European Union, while they compelled others, like the OSCE and NATO, to respond to crises on the continent in new ways. Now, with other challenges around the globe, our attention focuses elsewhere, recognizing at the same time the imperative of continued engagement in Southeast Europe.

Perhaps of all the precedents set, of all the lessons learned, few are as important as the establishment of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia – ICTY – and the understanding that justice must be part of post-conflict recovery. While we may understandably want to stabilize the Balkans and move on, those living in the region are understandably haunted by the evil they witnessed and, in some cases, barely survived. If place names like Vukovar and Srebrenica give us the chilling sense of horror, one can imagine their impact on those who were there and survived. Justice must be at the root of efforts to address the underlying causes of these conflicts if the people of the region are to overcome the legacy of this dark closing chapter of the 20th century.

Our speaker today, The Honorable Carla del Ponte, understands this reality more than anybody else. As ICTY's chief prosecutor since 1999, she is responsible for ensuring that those individuals responsible for war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide in contemporary Southeast Europe – people like Slobodan Milosevic, Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladic – are held accountable. As justice is pursued, the people of the region will be able to move forward. Ms. del Ponte brings over two decades of legal experience – much of it as a prosecutor in Switzerland – to this daunting task. We are pleased to welcome her here today to discuss where things stand in terms of indictees still at large, the need for access to information and witnesses, cooperation and support from our own government, and the prospects for the tribunal's future.