

Helsinki Commission Hearing:  
Bosnia-Herzegovina: Outstanding Issues in Post-Conflict Recovery and Reconciliation  
Thursday, November 8, 2007  
Statement of Representative Christopher H. Smith

Good afternoon. I am very pleased to be here for this important hearing today, and eager to hear testimonies of our witnesses, experts on the region for whom I have great respect. They have spent years working on Balkan issues, including considerable amounts of time in the region and Bosnia in particular.

I am especially pleased that we have a representative of the International Commission for Missing Persons, Adam Boys, among the panelists. Helping to learn the fate of missing persons is a relatively new field, but I was very impressed with a group that came through Washington four years ago to discuss this issue. They happened to be Serbs, and they were followed by a group of Albanians. In both cases, these were people who had lost sons and husbands – among the many persons still missing in the aftermath of this conflict. These are families unable to have any closure in what was already a horrific experience in this war. We invited them to testify before the Helsinki Commission, and their statements were truly moving. We know they have their counterparts among the Bosniaks and the Croats and other peoples in the Balkans that have been victimized by conflict in the 1990s.

The current situation in Bosnia is of great concern to me. As a long-time member and former Chairman of this Helsinki Commission, I have had the opportunity to document in numerous hearings the atrocities which took place in Bosnia from 1992 to 1995, including the genocide at Srebrenica. That event, I have to say, represented a true low point for the international community, as the Dutch UNPROFOR contingent turned over thousands of civilian men and boys for the Bosnian Serbs forces to abuse and execute. I was in Srebrenica this last July, and it is impossible to describe the experience of seeing those graves and imagining what it was like 12 years ago in that town.

Now, with ongoing concerns about war criminals still at large, constitutional reform, police reform, and population returns, we need to maintain – even increase – our attention to Bosnia, and encourage the Europeans to do the same. The most recent report from the Office of the High Representatives notes very little progress in many of these key issues. We cannot let inaction and discord dim the bright future that I believe awaits Bosnia. No people in the region suffered more than the people of Bosnia in the 1990's. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses how we can engage the government and people of Bosnia to help them move forward.

Finally, on a positive note, I want to mention that our country has been blessed by the strong growth of a Bosniak-American Community. Many Bosniaks came to the United States as refugees, and they and their children are now Americans, living productive lives and contributing to our country's prosperity. Some of them are in the audience today, and I want to welcome them here. They remain concerned about the future of Bosnia-Herzegovina and have encouraged us to create in the Congress a Bosnian Caucus to follow progress in Bosnia and help the country where we can. Representative Russ Carnahan and I co-chair the Caucus and hope it will engage in a variety of activities here in the Hill in the coming year.