



*ADDRESS BY  
THE PRESIDENT OF REPUBLIC OF SERBIA, H.E. TOMISLAV NIKOLIC  
AT THE SIGNING CEREMONY OF ICMP DECLARATION "THE ROLE OF THE  
STATE IN ADDRESSING THE ISSUE OF PERSONS MISSING AS A  
CONSEQUENCE OF ARMED CONFLICT AND HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES"  
AUGUST 29, 2014, MOSTAR, BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA*

Mr. Chairman,  
Distinguished fellow Presidents,  
Representatives of international organizations and associations of the families of  
missing persons,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

For more than two decades, our citizens and our future have been burdened by the issue of resolving the fate of persons missing as a consequence of the wars of the nineties in the territory of the former Yugoslavia. The outstanding problem of missing persons is an integral part of the horrors of war we had to endure, and a consequence that we find the most difficult to deal with, which undermines our cooperation and therefore the recovery and progress of all countries of the region.

The fact that today, a day before the International Day of the Disappeared, for all the difficulties, we will sign the Declaration on the role of the state in addressing the issue of persons missing as a consequence of armed conflict and human rights abuses, will provide an additional impetus to our efforts to off-load our moral burden of missing persons. Perhaps, other parts of the world will follow this example.

The initiative to adopt the Declaration has resulted from the aspiration to validate the efforts made so far in this respect in the region, but at the same time to send a strong message that the issue of missing persons in all corners of the world should be resolved with full awareness of the magnitude of this humanitarian problem and the responsibility of states for its solution.

I would like to express my gratitude to the International Commission on Missing Persons for their support and assistance provided ever since it came into being in 1996, in knowing the fate of the missing in this part of the world. I would also like to underscore the contribution made by the International Committee of the Red Cross and national Red Cross organizations in the region, their unflagging humanitarian engagement in the region, particularly when it comes to the issue of missing persons.

Distinguished Conference participants,

Today, we can say that we have achieved significant results in identifying the fate of missing persons. Out of almost 40 000 persons missing in conflicts in the territory of the former Yugoslavia, the whereabouts of around 11 000 persons is yet to be located. Work on the resolution of this issue is complex and long-lasting. According to the List of missing persons, forming an integral part of the records of the Commission on Missing Persons of the Government of the Republic of Serbia concerning the armed conflicts in the territory of the Republic of Croatia from 1991- 1995, contains 1751 persons of Serbian and other ethnic origins, whose fate is yet to be determined.

The Republic of Serbia is in favour of resolving the fate of the missing in accordance with the signed Agreement and the Protocol of Cooperation, since the largest number of their families lives in the Republic of Serbia, and many have permanently regulated their civil status in Serbia.

The issue of missing persons is a very sensitive humanitarian issue and calls for a responsible, continued and systematic approach and cooperation of all the relevant actors - states, international organizations, civil society and missing persons' associations. Each victim, each family of a missing person, regardless of their nationality, religion, language and other factors, deserves an unbiased and responsible treatment by all the relevant institutions responsible for determining the fate of the missing.

Information about the number of established cases offers little comfort to the families of the missing, who are living in uncertainty as to the destiny of their loved ones. Therefore, we have gathered here today to say to the families, relatives and friends of the missing and to the public at large, that we are willing to make every effort possible to solve each and every case of disappearances, and to bring to justice and mete out deserved punishments on the perpetrators.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The Republic of Serbia will continue to approach the resolution of this issue in a conscientious and responsible manner, knowing that the lapse of time should not diminish but should actually intensify our efforts aimed at a comprehensive solution of the heavy legacy of the past. The Republic of Serbia has signed all the relevant international instruments in the human rights field, including the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, which is one of the most important instruments defining the problem of missing persons at the global level.

Serbia will never give up searching for missing persons nor will it abandon requests that those responsible be prosecuted and sanctioned. There can be no statutory limitations for the solution of this problem, tantamount to oblivion.

On our part, we will do everything in our power to locate the whereabouts of the missing in the territory of Serbia. However, we expect of other signatories to do so as well.

In achieving this goal, the Commission on the Missing Persons of the Government of the Republic of Serbia, in communication and coordination with the relevant national institutions, has been working for almost two decades, together with the families of missing persons, states of the region, international partners and representatives of the civil society on knowing the destiny of the missing. I believe that our today's meeting and the signature of the Declaration will serve as an additional encouragement to all relevant national institutions of my own and other countries in the unavoidable regional cooperation in the fields of justice and humanitarian and human rights law. We must not leave this issue to others to deal with. Why should the burden of our own incompetence and irresponsibility be borne by our children? We have nothing to hide.

Finding a solution to this complex problem would serve as a big and important stimulus to the strengthening of reconciliation and bilateral and regional cooperation between our states. As a responsible member of the international community and a country which has embarked on the European integration process, the Republic of Serbia will spare no effort to solve the painful issue of persons missing in the region, regardless of their nationality or religion.

We are partners to anyone wishing to encourage regional cooperation not only in this field, but also on all other issues of concern for the region.

Thank you for your attention.