

## The Genocide

The Srebrenica Genocide was the premeditated and organized murder of more than 8,000 Bosnian Muslim men and boys in July 1995, in and around the town of Srebrenica. The atrocity was committed in the final stages of the three-and-a-half-year conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It took place after the UN-declared Safe Areas of Srebrenica and Žepa had fallen to Bosnian Serb armed forces.

Thousands of men and boys left Srebrenica on 11 July 1995 and made their way toward Tuzla, which was controlled by the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In the following days they were repeatedly ambushed,

separated into groups and captured. Hundreds were killed and left in the forest; many more were taken prisoner and executed. Men and boys who had stayed in Srebrenica were detained by Serb forces and were executed. The bodies were buried in numerous mass graves in eastern Bosnia and the perpetrators later used heavy machinery to remove the bodies from primary mass graves to secondary sites, sometimes 50 kilometers from the original execution sites. This orchestrated effort to conceal evidence of the crimes resulted in bodies being disarticulated, with the remains of one person often deposited in several different graves.

In 2007, the International Court of Justice concurred with the earlier determination of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) that these crimes amounted to genocide. These judgments were supported by the International Commission on Missing Persons (ICMP), which used advanced DNA methods to identify the Srebrenica victims. ICMP's use of DNA was the first time scientific methods of identification were applied to largescale missing persons scenarios.

**ICMP's use of DNA was the first time scientific methods of identification were applied to largescale missing persons scenarios.**

## Missing persons from the Genocide

ICMP's DNA laboratory system went online in 2001 and today almost 7,000 of the 8,000 persons who disappeared in July 1995 have been accurately identified. In addition, through DNA-based identifications, ICMP was able to reveal the extent to which perpetrators attempted to conceal their crimes. Typically, a person missing from the Srebrenica genocide is found in three to four different massgraves, often many kilometres apart.

As of June 2022, ICMP had received 7,743 reports of persons missing from the fall of Srebrenica and nearby places. Their relatives have provided 22,330 biological reference samples

for DNA testing. By comparing the DNA profiles of the surviving family members with DNA profiles extracted from human remains recovered from clandestine gravesites, ICMP has identified 6,979 victims. To date, using DNA and non DNA methods, 7,015 victims have been identified. ICMP estimates the number of persons killed as a result of the fall of Srebrenica as just over 8,000.

ICMP submits DNA match reports to authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina in charge of conducting official missing persons investigations, issuing death certificates, and returning the mortal remains of the missing to their

families. ICMP DNA match reports are based on a minimum 99.95 percent statistical certainty, although in most cases the degree of certainty is far higher. ICMP DNA and related evidence was presented at the ICTY in the Hague and at war crimes trials in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Twenty individuals have been tried at the ICTY for crimes related to Srebrenica, and 57 have appeared before the State Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Four life sentences and 36 other sentences have been handed down, in part based on the largest DNA-identification effort in history.

**ICMP's DNA laboratory system went online in 2001 and today around 7,000 of the 8,000 persons who disappeared have been accurately identified.**

## Securing rights and state responsibility

States are responsible for conducting effective investigations into missing persons cases and for establishing the circumstances of their disappearance. Article 2 of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, to which Bosnia and Herzegovina is a party, provides for the protection by law of the right to life, and is generally understood to create material and procedural obligations to carry out investigations. This obligation persists until the missing person has been accounted for, or until adequate measures have been taken to investigate the disappearance. Accordingly, persons who go missing or are victims of enforced

disappearance, even decades ago, are entitled to protection under the law, and their relatives and others close to a missing or disappeared person have a continuing right to official, adequate and transparent investigations.

Bosnia and Herzegovina endeavours to fulfil its obligations through mutually enforcing institutions, the Missing Persons Institute of Bosnia and Herzegovina (MPI), and the Prosecutor's Office of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The MPI, established in 2005 and fully operational since 2008, provides Bosnia and Herzegovina with a sustainable domestic mechanism to locate missing persons regardless of their ethnic, religious or national

affiliation, or their role in past hostilities. MPI also ensures that mass grave sites are protected, documented and properly excavated, and that relatives of the missing and others are able to participate in the institution's work. Together with the BIH Council of Ministers, ICMP is a co-founder of the MPI.

Families' persistent demand for their rights and constant lobbying contributed significantly to the country's progress on the issue. The tireless work of Srebrenica associations of families of the missing has been key to influencing the process and to finding almost 90 percent of the missing from Srebrenica.

Since 1995, the international legal frameworks that support rule-of-law based efforts to account for the missing have been strengthened, and the responsibilities of states defined more clearly. Efforts by the families of Srebrenica victims, authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina and their international

partners – including ICMP – have showed that it is possible to find more missing persons than anyone would have thought possible when the genocide occurred. Despite challenges, including the denial of the events surrounding Srebrenica and political developments that continuously threaten to derail

the process, the work to find the remaining missing must continue until all victims have been accounted for and all survivors, regardless of their religious or national background have access to rights. Sustainable peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the region depends on it.



[Srebrenica Figures – a 2022 infographic](#)

[Missing Persons from the Armed Conflict of the 1990s: A Stocktaking on the effort to locate and identify missing persons in Bosnia and Herzegovina – a 2014 report](#)