

Documents & Projects

RESEARCH AND DOCUMENTATION CENTER SARAJEVO

Victims' data base

Until today our archives have grown to millions of pages, audio and video recordings and documents. Facts which we collected are important for researchers, scientists, but also for prosecutors, both national and foreign, first of all The Hague Tribunal and the Department for War Crimes with the Court of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Since April 2004 the Research and Documentation Center (IDC) is active in Sarajevo. This non-governmental, non-profit and above all impartial institution, is collecting data, documents and facts on genocide, war crimes, violations of international humanitarian law and human rights, which were committed in Bosnia-Herzegovina during the war. It is important to stress that in our work we do not pay attention to the national affiliation of the victims, but we collect all stories and data on individuals and events having the truth as our only criterion.



Although the Center exists somewhat less than two years, working devotedly we managed to expand our capacity, to increase the number of employees and to create new plans for which we hope to be realized in the near future. What we are particularly proud of is that we have gathered a group of young people who for their own good, but also for the future generations, want to develop a relation to the past that will enable them to continue a normal life. To come to know the truth is certainly part of this process. The second important achievement is our cooperation with similar organizations in the region. Through a few projects we are thus connected with the Centre for Humanitarian Law in Belgrade and the Documenta center from Zagreb. Through this cooperation we have already managed to accomplish significant things in the field we are active in, but we hope that our common projects will be even more successful in the future.

Facts

We have made an enormous effort to form the data base. Our archives have until today grown to millions of pages, audio and video recordings and different documents. Among these documents are testimonies of those who survived, facts on victims, killed, missing persons, raped... Through contacts with citizens we have been able to register 440 prisons and concentration camps, 320 mass graves and 900 cases of mass murders in which the victims were mainly civilians. Facts which we collected are important for researchers, scientists, but also for prosecutors, both national and foreign, first of all The Hague Tribunal and the Department for War Crimes with the Court of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Maybe the biggest project that we are engaged in we named "Losses in population 1992-1995". This project is entirely aimed at collecting facts on victims of the past war. For years we were living in a world in which information were dictated to us depending on the "side" which gave the numbers and on possible benefits which someone could gain. Thus, like many times in the history of the Balkans, history has once again become subject to manipulations which gives rise to prejudices, stereotypes, or, possibly, untruth which lead to new conflicts and misunderstandings. Therefore it is essential to face the past, but in such a way as to comprehend the facts and build an image which will be based only upon truth.

Search for this unique truth is our strategic plan. For us this means to prevent the revision of history, forgery and manipulation, and the establishment of an environment in which there will be a stronger feeling of social responsibility in regard to the sufferings of victims, as well as a possibility to bring peace to the victims' families and friends. The process also opens possibilities to explain and solve social and economic consequences of violence. Finally, facing the past means the identification of most appropriate models in search for justice, truth and the rule of law as a guarantee for preventing conflict and for lasting peace.

Oral history

The project "Losses in population" does exactly this, it reveals facts upon which the truth is based. For years we have been working on the formation of a data base with the names of all victims so as to establish as precisely as possible their exact number. We estimate that this data base will give a list with 100,000 names. Of course, the data base will remain open and we shall make an effort to leave in our work an open possibility for everybody who wants to add a new name and thus help in completing this difficult task. Those working in the Center are continuing to write names of the victims every day, eight hours a day. In order to make this data base really trustworthy and relevant, we are doing our best to check each and every name and fact that we get on every individual with more than one source. The data base will offer those interested an insight into the list of victims classified by municipalities in which they lived/lost lives, ethnic affiliation of victims, their status (soldiers, civilians, children...), sex, level of education...

In the next year we plan a number of tasks, which will continue our mission. One of the priority projects we named "Oral History". Our aim is to identify as big as possible a number of citizens of Bosnia-Herzegovina who want to testify, in their own words, on events from the near past. To give the opportunity to participants of war events to tell us what they saw, what they felt, what they were afraid of, what were their hopes – this will give as yet another specific picture of the war. Like the other methods that we are using in our work, this, too, will be a valuable source of information for all those interested to know what happened in the Balkans at the beginning of the nineties of the previous century.

And this is crucial for us, because our work is focused primarily on the victims, because it will give an opportunity to all those who survived these difficult years to talk and thus maybe find a way to deal with their past, which is also a very important process in a final cure of wounds which the war has left in all of us.

The realization of the project "Oral history" will start next year, but it will last longer in order to make it possible for a bigger number of people to talk. Each story, each word, is precious to us. In order to complete this project truly in a way that will be useful for the broader community, we will implement special methods which we shall develop together with our collaborators, both from the Center itself and the friends of the Center here and abroad.

Positive stories

The themes that we established as priority are positive stories, or stories about those who have overcome all horrors of war and found enough strength in themselves to remain human and help others regardless of all differences. The other theme that we shall deal with from the beginning are the stories of prisoners of war. Those who survived Srebrenica will also have the opportunity to talk about their days in this UN safe haven, conflicts, genocide. This part of the project we will realize on the regional level in order to give to everyone, both the victims and the perpetrators, the opportunity to speak about this unique event in modern history of Europe. Oral history will encompass also the fate of the women who were raped during war, children, we shall write down stories of witnesses of mass murders, destruction of monuments of culture, life in cities under siege, we shall talk with medical people, journalists, soldiers, war criminals... That it not be forgotten.

Yet another important project for us deals with the media in war and political propaganda that was dictated from cabinets. All those who at the beginning of the nineties were living in the territory of the former Yugoslavia witnessed how from the TV and front pages the war was entering their homes. Through the media, politicians made propaganda for hatred, xenophobia, fear ... Individuals were swapped for nations, truth for lies. Our everyday language was colored by hatred. Unfortunately, those who were obedient to the regime and spread this hatred, are working in the media nowadays as well or, even worse, in educational institutions throughout former Yugoslavia and are teaching the new generation of unprofessionals who one day can swap their pen or microphone for arms.

To analyze the work of media during war, and the consequences of political propaganda, is the aim of this project which will partly also be realized in the entire region. By analyzing the work of the media immediately before and during the war we hope to be able to give yet another dimension which will testify about the past. War crimes were committed in the media as well and it is time that we start talking and writing about that.

Information on our work is available on our web-site, but we are also trying to present ourselves to the public through other activities as well. We have published a number of books until now, we worked on the realization of a number of documentaries, and we will continue with this in the future.

Monitoring trials

The media were in the first lines, they were in politicians' cabinets, in places where war crimes were committed, in front of the victims which told their stories immediately after suffering... A new expression was established during the wars – patriotic journalism – for journalists who were accompanying soldiers to the front lines and whose job often excluded professional rules. Insight into media reports during the war enables to make a chronology of war events and to indicate the key roles and events and actors. At the same time, this project will represent the first comprehensive analysis of the work of the media during war. We do hope that one of the results of this project will be the ability to restore confidence in media in all three countries which were involved in the war.



One of the projects that have already started is the monitoring of war crimes trials. This project, too, is realized on the regional level. The international community sees the work of the national judicial system as a political priority necessary to the so much wanted process of stabilization and democratization in the country. There is still a high risk that the war crime trials before national courts will be conditioned by the political will of the current authorities, or by the political convictions of the judges.

Confidence in national courts on all levels is necessary, first of all for the victims and the injured, but also for suspects and perpetrators, as well as for the public, particularly when the trial is conducted either in a region where the power of some political parties is predominant, or in front of courts in neighboring countries.

Taking all these aforementioned into account, it is very important to have a systemic monitoring of war crime trials on the national and regional level. The dehumanization of victims is continued through negation and amnesty for crimes, and only building confidence in the judicial administration can contribute to the revival of justice. The monitoring of trials and objective reporting represents an intervention whose aim it is to strengthen awareness of the judicial administration which must constantly apply impartial, legal and just international standards in the trials. The presence of observers at trials represents the fulfillment of the principle of transparency for the public (one of the main elements of a just trial) to what the victims, the perpetrators and the public are fully entitled to.

Having in mind the human rights and the civil society, all (families and friends of the victims) want to preserve the memories of their names and deeds. Collecting and preserving memories is not only within human nature, but a right of all those who suffered and missed during the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina in the period 1992-1995. Therefore we must continue to complete the ICD data base, and also make further efforts in order to accomplish our final mission of facing the past and removing any possibility of manipulating the truth.

Finally, let us not forget our regular activities which are also very significant - starting with the strengthening of cooperation with other non-governmental organizations, in the country and beyond, cooperation with judicial institutions, universities, up to the cooperation with victims and witnesses, which for us is the most important one. We help them prepare for the trials and are trying to find ways for them to feel as secure as possible in these processes.