

Whole School Assembly

Srebrenica Genocide

This document provides a whole school assembly plan suitable to commemorate the anniversary of the Srebrenica genocide during Srebrenica Memorial Week 2016. The assembly should provide learning opportunities, as well as honouring the victims and survivors.

The assembly would also be suitable for use with smaller groups, such as year groups, form or tutor groups.



It is highly recommended that before presenting this assembly you take the time to read through the text and view the accompanying PowerPoint presentation. The assembly should be tailored towards the needs of the pupils within your school, where appropriate, and may also be used as part of a wider remembrance programme. For example, where Remembering Srebrenica delegates or survivors of the Srebrenica genocide have been invited to speak.

At the end of this document there are suggestions for further reading and resources if either you or your students would like to know more.

For more information about the Srebrenica genocide or the work of Remembering Srebrenica, please visit <http://www.srebrenica.org.uk/>

For this presentation you will need:

- Equipment to display the PowerPoint presentation

Slide one

Front Cover

Slide Two

In 2009, the European Union made the 11 July Srebrenica Memorial Day.¹ This day of commemoration was introduced to honour the victims and survivors of the genocide at Srebrenica in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Eastern Europe, in 1995. This is viewed as the worst atrocity in Europe since the Second World War which claimed the lives of over 8,000 men and boys and scarred the lives of thousands more.

On Srebrenica Memorial Day we remember those who were killed and those relatives who were left behind. As with Holocaust Memorial Day in January, Srebrenica Memorial Day gives us the opportunity to challenge ourselves to consider lessons from the past and what we can all do to create a better, more tolerant society in the future.

In today's assembly we will learn what happened at Srebrenica, why it happened, and how important it is to prevent prejudice before it turns into hatred and violence.

Slide Three

Before we discuss Srebrenica it is important to make sure that we all understand what we mean when we use the word 'genocide'.

The crime of genocide is defined in international law as an act 'committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group'.

Genocide is generally carried out through the attempted killing of all members of a group, but can also be classified as deliberately 'placing a group in conditions calculated to prevent their survival' (such as concentration camps).

At Srebrenica, men were systematically separated from women and children before being killed, indicating that their death was planned and organised. People who commit these crimes sometimes try to explain them away by saying that they were committed by a few bad individuals, but imagine how many individuals it takes to organise the execution and burial of 8,372 people.

¹ For assistance with pronunciation, Srebrenica is generally pronounced: Sreb- ren- nitza.

Slide Four

So now that we understand what genocide means, we can explain what happened at Srebrenica in July 1995.

Srebrenica is a small town in eastern Bosnia. As you can see from the map Bosnia sits in-between Serbia, Croatia and Montenegro in South-East Europe. Bosnia used to be part of the country known as Yugoslavia. It has a mixed population of Catholic Christians, Orthodox Christians and Muslims. These religions also link to other identities. Catholic Christians tend to be Bosnian Croat. Orthodox Christians tend to be Bosnian Serb, while Muslims are known as Bosniaks or Bosnian Muslims.

These communities have lived alongside each other for hundreds of years. For a long time from the Second World War until the 1990s they lived together in relative peace, and communities often seemed integrated.

Slide Five

In the 1980s, the decline of communism and a rise in nationalism undermined the unity of the Yugoslav state, and in the early 90s, the six republics of the former Yugoslavia disintegrated into civil war. Fighting broke out within Bosnia, as Serb nationalist forces waged a co-ordinated campaign of 'ethnic cleansing' intended to create a 'Greater Serbian' territory. Through this process Bosnian Muslims and Bosnian Croats were driven out of many parts of the country. Historically, Bosnia-Herzegovina had been a diverse and multi-ethnic society. This campaign of ethnic cleansing had the purpose of creating an ethnically segregated Bosnia.

This resulted in a war which would turn neighbour against neighbour and where over 100,000 people were killed and thousands more traumatised.

There was violence across the country, and the capital, Sarajevo, endured the longest-ever military siege, 1,425 days or nearly four years in total. So children who started school in year 7, would have been almost finished with year 10 by the time the siege was lifted and they could walk safely through the streets again.

In the east, the Bosnian Serb army besieged the town of Srebrenica. The people inside the town were mostly Bosnian Muslims.

Slide Six

In 1993, the United Nations declared Srebrenica a safe zone, but in July 1995 Bosnian Serb forces attacked the town. There were a small number of Dutch UN troops, who were there to protect the town but they failed to stop the Bosnian Serb forces.

Slide Seven

(Power Point video- Hasan Hasanović- 1.06)

Listen to the brief account of Hasan Hasanović, now curator of the Srebrenica Potocari memorial.

Inside the town there was chaos. Some people retreated to a battery factory at a place called Potočari² where the Dutch soldiers were based.

Up to 15,000 men and boys who did not believe that the Dutch would protect them chose instead to try to walk through the hills to reach another safe zone with what remained of the Bosnian Muslim forces. The vast majority were unarmed.

Serb forces entered Srebrenica and General Ratko Mladic was filmed declaring, "We give this town to the Serb nation....The time has come to take revenge on the Muslims." Mladic's speech underlines that Bosnian Serb aims were to ethnically cleanse the area of Bosnian Muslims.

At the Dutch base and with cooperation from the UN troops, Bosnian Serb forces separated men and older boys from women and children, pretending that the men would be taken to a safe area to be exchanged. In fact they were driven to fields and large buildings nearby and killed.

Slide Eight

The men and boys who had left to walk through the hills also suffered. Bosnian Serb forces entered the hills and attacked the unarmed men and boys who were trying to escape. Many were captured and then taken to nearby locations and executed. In total, Bosnian Serb forces are believed to have killed 8,372 men and boys in and around Srebrenica. The journey of those who tried to escape through the hills became known as the 'The Column' or 'Death March'.

Slide Nine

After they had committed their crimes Bosnian Serb forces worried that their acts of genocide would be discovered. So, they dug up the mass graves and reburied the people they had executed in hundreds of smaller sites to try to prevent the international community charging them with war crimes.

Through the work of organisations such as the Bosnia Missing Persons Institute and the International Commission on Missing Persons these efforts have been in vain. Many mass graves have been found and people given back their identities and buried. For many more

² To assist with pronunciation Potočari is generally pronounced: Pot-o-chari.

relatives and survivors the wait goes on, even twenty one years later, to find evidence of their loved ones and to be able to bury their bodies.

Key individuals such as Ratko Mladic are now on trial in the International Criminal Court at The Hague for war crimes and earlier this year, the former Bosnian Serb President, Radovan Karadzic was found guilty of genocide in Srebrenica, war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Slide Ten

The impact of the genocide continues to haunt Srebrenica, despite the capture of some individuals. The mothers and relatives of those who died continue to fight for justice. Every year hundreds more bodies are identified and buried. This is very traumatic for those affected. Srebrenica used to be predominantly Bosnian Muslim. Now it is 95% Bosnian Serb. Those who have returned to their homes have to live alongside people who may have committed crimes against them.

Slide Eleven

Today we have learnt about the genocide at Srebrenica in 1995 and its terrible impact. Bosnia was a country with a long history of communities living side-by-side and what happened there demonstrates that, if left unchecked, hatred and intolerance can grow and be unleashed to terrible effect.

We have done much in the UK to promote tolerance and combat racism, but we can still learn lessons from the events at Srebrenica. We can honour the victims by pledging ourselves to find ways to make society better and more inclusive for everyone. We can mark Srebrenica Memorial Day on 11 July, as well as Holocaust Memorial Day on 27 January, to remind us to do what we can to make sure that these crimes never take place again.

By being in this assembly you have already made a contribution by remembering Srebrenica and commemorating the victims of genocide. Genocide is a crime which not only aims to destroy lives, but also stories, cultures and memories and by remembering the victims and sharing the stories from Srebrenica, we as a community go some way to resisting this crime.

What else can you pledge to do to make sure that we keep our own society safe from hatred and intolerance?

You could pledge to:

- Find out more about Srebrenica
- Share the story of Srebrenica with friends and family
- Write a story, poem or blog about Srebrenica
- Do something in your own community to bring people together