

## Remarks at the Signing Ceremony for the Balkan Peace Agreement in Paris

*December 14, 1995*

President Chirac, President Izetbegovic, President Tudjman, President Milosevic, Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali, Secretary General Solana, High Representative Bildt, Prime Minister Filali, Prime Minister Chernomyrdin, Prime Minister Major, Prime Minister Gonzalez, Chancellor Kohl: Let me begin, on behalf of the people of the United States, by thanking all of those whose labor and wisdom helped to keep hope alive during the long, dark years of war, the humanitarian relief workers, the United Nations forces from Europe and beyond. Had it not been for their dedication and their sacrifice, the toll of the war in Bosnia would have been even greater.

And I thank those whose work helped make this moment of peace possible, beginning with our host, Prime Minister Chirac, for his vigor and determination; Prime Minister Major, who was a full partner in the development of the rapid reaction force and our NATO cooperation; and our friend Chancellor Kohl, who has taken so many of the refugees and who now is sending German troops beyond his border in this historic common endeavor. I thank the leaders of the strong NATO and the determined negotiating team of Russians, Europeans, and Americans.

All of you have brought us to this bright new day, when Bosnia turns from the horror of war to the promise of peace. President Izetbegovic, President Tudjman, President Milosevic, by making peace you have answered the call of your people. You have heard them say, "Stop the war. End the suffering. Give our children the blessings of a normal life."

In this chorus for peace today we also hear the hallowed voices of the victims, the children whose playgrounds were shelled into killing fields, the young girls brutalized by rape, the men shot down in mass graves, those who starved in the camps, those who died in battle, the millions taken from their homes and torn from their families. Even from beyond the grave there are victims singing the song of peace today. May their voices be in our minds and our hearts forever.

In Dayton, these three Balkan leaders made the fateful choice for peace. Today, Mr. Presidents, you have bound yourselves to peace. But tomorrow you must turn the pages of this agreement into a real-life future of hope for those who have survived this horrible war. At your request, the United States and more than 25 other nations will send you our most precious resource, the men and women of our Armed Forces. Their mission, to allow the Bosnian people to emerge from a nightmare of fear into a new day of security, according to terms you have approved, in a manner that is evenhanded and fair to all.

The international community will work with you to change the face of Bosnia: to meet human needs; to repair and to rebuild; to reunite children with their families and refugees with their homes; to oversee democratic elections, advance human rights, and call to account those accused of war crimes.

We can do all these things, but we cannot guarantee the future of Bosnia. No one outside can guarantee that Muslims, Croats, and Serbs in Bosnia will come together and stay together as free citizens in a united country sharing a common destiny. Only the Bosnian people can do that.

I know the losses have been staggering, the scars are deep. We feel even today that the wounds have not healed. But Bosnia must find a way, with God's grace, to lay down the hatreds, to give up the revenge, to go forward together. That is the road—indeed, that is the only road—to the future.

We see from Northern Ireland to the Middle East, from South Africa to Haiti, people turning from hatred to hope. Here in Europe, countries that for centuries fought now work together for peace. Soon the Bosnian people will see for themselves the awesome potential of people to turn from conflict to cooperation. In just a few days troops from all over Europe and North America and elsewhere—troops from Great Britain, France, and Germany, troops from Greece and Turkey, troops from Poland and Lithuania, and troops from the United States and Russia, former enemies, now friends—will answer the same call and share the same responsibilities to achieve the same goal, a lasting peace in Bosnia where enemies can become friends.

Why would they do this? Because their hearts are broken by the suffering and the slaughter; because their minds recoil at the prospect of needless spreading war in the heart of Europe. But they—we—do so in the face of skeptics who say the people of the Balkans cannot escape their bloody past, that Balkan hearts are too hard for

peace.

But let us remember this war did violence not only to Bosnia's people but also to Bosnia's history. For Bosnia once found unity in its diversity. Generations of Muslims, Orthodox, Catholics, and Jews lived side by side and enriched the world by their example. They built schools and libraries and wondrous places of worship. Part of the population laid down their tools on Friday, part on Saturday, and part on Sunday. But their lives were woven together by marriage and culture, work, a common language, and a shared pride in a place that then they all called home. Now, if that past is any guide, this peace can take hold. And if the people of Bosnia want a decent future for their children, this peace must take hold.

Here in this City of Light, at this moment of hope, let us recall how this century—marked by so much progress and too much bloodshed, witness to humanity's best and humanity's worst—how this century began in Bosnia. At the dawn of the century, when gunfire in Sarajevo sparked the first of our two World Wars, the British Foreign Secretary, Sir Edward Gray, said these words: "The lamps are going out all over Europe. We shall not see them lit again in our lifetimes."

But they were lit again, by an extraordinary generation of Europeans and Americans. The torch of freedom they carried now shines more brightly than ever before on every continent. That torch can shine on Bosnia again, but first it must warm the hearts of the Bosnian people.

So I say to all the people of the Balkans on behalf of all of us who would come to see this peace take hold: You have seen what war has wrought. You know what peace can bring. Seize this chance and make it work. You can do nothing to erase the past, but you can do everything to build the future. Do not let your children down.

Thank you.