

## Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum Memorial Lecture

### *"The Consequences of Interreligious Hatred: The Case of Bosnia and Its Lessons for World Peace"*

Presented by Honorable Haris Silajdzic, Co-Prime Minister of the Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina  
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Your Eminence, Excellencies, distinguished guests and friends, I am so pleased to be back in the United States and to join the Tanenbaum Foundation this evening. Earlier, Mayor Giuliani indicated that he had been active in the prosecution of war criminals following the Second World War. Before I proceed, I must say unfortunately that the job of bringing war criminals to justice is not finished. Mayor Giuliani, we have some candidates in Bosnia for you to prosecute.

It is my great honor to be here tonight to take part in these ceremonies. I'm especially privileged to join you all in continuing the vital work of a great man, an extraordinary religious leader, Marc Tanenbaum. I would like to use this opportunity to offer my congratulations to Georgette Bennett, my friends Richard Holbrooke and Kati Marton, and to thank David Phillips, who originally invited me to participate in this program. I am honored to be here with you tonight.

Let me quote a sentence by Rabbi Tanenbaum. He said that "educational development and communication among peoples is essential to reduce the abrasive effects of differences. These differences, as we have learned in the pluralistic experiences of America, can be a source of enrichment rather than a threat." Rabbi Tanenbaum thought that communication was important. In the spirit of clear communication and an open, honest dialogue, I would like to convey a few important messages. I would not like to call my remarks a lecture. Rather, I would like to share some of my thoughts with you. To confide some of my dilemmas, and to raise some of the questions with which I struggle daily and for which I do not yet have an answer.

Communications in the next century will be critically important to mutual understanding and the rapprochement between cultures. Because of increased population densities, because of better communications, we are experiencing a global contraction. But this does not necessarily mean that communities and nations are growing closer. Rabbi Tanenbaum implied that by getting closer and thereby getting to know each other, the likelihood of misunderstanding and conflict would be reduced. As a Muslim, allow me tonight to paraphrase a verse of the Koran. It says that men and women and tribes were created so that you can know each other. Communication is a good start to knowing each other. And knowing each other is something that we must lay to do. The alternative is tragic. Humankind gravitates toward violence. That is the source of my concern, especially when we come to the next century.

The next century will be the century of clashes between cultures. I agree partly with Professor Huntington. Hopefully, the 21st century will not be marred by the clash of civilizations. If we judge the next century by our experiences in this century, we have a great task ahead of us in assuring peace and security around the world.

As guarantors of social stability and harmonious intercommunal relations, world religions can play a big role. Religious leaders can also play an important role as peacemakers and bridge builders. My lecture is entitled "The Consequences of Interreligious Hatred: The Case of Bosnia and its Lessons for World Peace." Yet I must say that I do not believe in interreligious hatred. I do not believe that a spiritual man who believes in God can hate another human being. We can talk about interreligious hatred and manipulation of communities by religious leaders. I believe that the essence of religion can, to some extent, help prevent what I am afraid may be coming.

Religion can provide us with the teaching, wisdom and tools to prevent violence. I hope I am right because otherwise, judging by the last century, this next century looms as a threat. The last century was the age of enlightenment. Yet during the age of enlightenment more than 170 million people were killed through wanton acts of violence. Some 70 million people were killed by fascism and communism. These are ideologies that had nothing to do with religion. Many died during forced collectivization. Most, of course, died during the great wars of the 20th century.

These senseless killings occurred despite our morality and natural love of humankind. Many more would have been killed if the technology of war had been more sophisticated. So technology was not restricted by

our moral beliefs. Our ability to murder even more people was limited merely by poor technology. This is a fact of life. And if we are not-careful in the next century, we may witness the killing often times as many. I see no other restraint on murder than morality. Religion can be the cause of healing, not necessarily an inspiration to murder. As the situation is now, we see many tensions along the fault lines between the cultures which are rooted in religious identity. People are afraid of each other because they do not know each other. That's why knowing each other is very important. And knowing means real knowledge -- being able to listen to other people; to tolerate different views and to co-exist.

I come from Bosnia tonight and I bring you the message of Bosnia. People can live together even if they have different faiths or different ethnic backgrounds. There is no doubt that people can live together. Bosnia proved that over the last one thousand years. We lived together and whatever trouble came to Bosnia, it came from the outside, not from inside. Yesterday I had to point out that Bosnia was not an ethnic conflict. The conflict in Bosnia was caused by pure and simple aggression. It was a war of expansion and fascist aggression. It's not even correct to call it a war. It was a slaughter of civilians. Only when we had enough arms to defend ourselves did it become a war. But then it stopped; the killers were not ready to die. The antagonists were not religious. No religious man who really believes in sacred principles can kill a creation of God, let alone kill or torture a child. Wanton violence born out of aggression and greed has nothing to do with religion. Genocide is motivated by other things.

In both its tragedy and its hope Bosnia offers a good example. What's been happening to us for the last five years is an aberration in Bosnia's history: it is not a role. For centuries, different religions have lived peacefully together in Bosnia. The proof is that one thousand sacred sites, buildings, etc. of all religions stood until the end of the twentieth century. They were symbols proving that people can live together. But at the end of the twentieth century, one thousand sacred sites of different religions were destroyed.

Is this progress? Is progress measured by greed, ego, power and the accumulation of wealth? Can man live by bread alone, as the bible says? Without spiritual sustenance we are in serious

trouble. Bosnia shows that we are still capable of so much good -- and so much bad. The psychological barrier, once broken, unleashes frightening possibilities. That is why I call on all of us to prevent the prophecy of Bosnia. Bosnia can be a bridge or Bosnia can be an abyss. It's up to us. Bosnia reflects the state of mind and spirit of us all. Bosnia is a place of hope and despair. That is Bosnia. It's up to us to choose the path of peace.

For hundreds of years, before Islam came to Bosnia, Bosnia was a little bit of an odd creature in Europe because it sheltered people who thought differently. From the Middle Ages, Bosnia was a dissident among European nations. Today maybe we are paying the price. But history proved that we can live together in Bosnia. Even after the conflict, I have no doubt about it. We shall live together. This is not an academic, far-fetched notion. We proved that by preserving one thousand sacred sites for so long. In 1492, a ship left the shores of Spain. Approximately five hundred years later, one of the descendants of those who left the shores of Spain, became Bosnia's Ambassador to the United States of America. I am sorry that he is not with us tonight. Ambassador Sven Alkalaj is a descendant of those who fled religious persecution in Spain to come to Bosnia. So Bosnia, as a safe harbor to people fleeing religious persecution, is a real destination. Bosnia proves that we can live together, and that we shall live together. In the meantime, we've to prevent future aggressions. Bosnia is a warning. For Eastern Europe, Western Europe, and the world.

The homemade sickness of Europe is ethnic supremacy and intolerance. Despite our efforts, it is always alive. And we must guard against this malignancy lest it rise again as an even more toxic virus. In order to preserve peace in Bosnia, we have to take care of a few things which, in my mind, are very important. A crime was committed in Bosnia. Another crime is being committed by those who introduce moral equivalency between the victim and the aggressor. Victim and aggressor cannot be the same. Evil and good are not equal. War criminals are still at large in Bosnia. They give interviews; talk to people; conduct the policy of their entity; and are well and happy. And they designed a plan to kill 200,000 people, by opening concentration camps, where people were burned alive, and at least 20,000 women were raped. Today there are more than one million refugees who still cannot return home despite assurances in the Dayton Accord.

Other than being a humiliation, the simmering situation also poses practical problems. We cannot implement the Dayton agreement -- the architect of which is my friend Richard Holbrooke, who is here this evening. The peace accord did stop the war, but it's not being implemented. We cannot advance the cause of coexistence because of those war criminals. I implore you to urge the international community to apprehend

those people and send them to the War Crimes Tribunal in Hague. It is not my fight, nor is it anybody's right, to relinquish the right of those killed and raped, to see justice served. So whatever government can do it, this justice will serve all of humanity. Justice will correct, at least to some extent, the wrong which was done to innocent people.

With this lesson behind us, we approach a new millennium. It is very difficult to change the cultural map of the world. The global economy cannot make global culture. So we will have different cultures, different ethnicities, for some time to come. We have to cope with our differences. In a multi-ethnic world, we must learn to tolerate each other and to co-exist.

Now the question is whether globalization, which I support, is possible without relinquishing identities. Since people maintain their identities, it is very difficult in Europe to enforce a mechanical integration. Europe is today a mechanical sum of nation states. Is it possible to create a superstructure while preserving individuality and ethnic identity? We had a multi-cultural system that worked in Bosnia. Bosnia is a prototype of what Europe wants to be. That's probably why Bosnia was targeted for destruction. Without that individualization, we cannot create a diverse superstructure. The balance between individualization and integration is very subtle. If we are to succeed, we must try to use all those communication tools. At the least we must avoid miscommunication. In my mind, to use communications to know each other prevents fear and renders infertile the ground for that alien virus of which I spoke earlier. The alternative involves tension, paranoia and war.

The other question is: Can the world, especially the troubled third world, live without the familiar structures that defined social order? Communism is gone. I come from a former communist country, and there is confusion because people are used to being told what to do. Can the world live without hierarchies? Can we face the challenge of democracy and self-expression? We must.

So where will the new world order come from? Will it come from Europe? Shall we have a movement based on fascism or communism? Will this be Europe's new gift to civilization? I don't think so. The world is no longer one-centered or bipolar. Power is increasingly decentralized. In today's multipolar world, knowing and tolerating each other is so important. Because of the Muslim community, Bosnia has become a litmus test for the Islamic world. Hundreds of millions of people watch Bosnia asking whether cooperation is possible, or is confrontation necessary. That's the question they ask. The answer must validate cooperation.

In Bosnia, who destroyed those one thousand sacred sites? What brand of fundamentalism did that? Whose fundamentalism could condone such horrors? It was not Islamic. Muslims didn't do it. It was not Christian, either. Those who committed atrocities may call themselves Christians, but they are not Christians. Such horrors defy the terms of religious intolerance or fundamentalism. We have the old name for it-- fascism. Primitive, pure and simple, fascism. Still alive in Europe.

But now, there is something else. Something we have not known before. It's a mutant; it's very dangerous and it did not die in Bosnia. We must prevent whatever is coming. May I not be right. But I see some symptoms in Bosnia which reflect a twisted state of mind, spirit, and humanity. Bosnia is a warning. We hope Bosnia's misfortune was not wasted. Bosnia's tragedy may be a tributary to the collective memory of humankind. Lessons derived from our grief must be kept alive. That's why I'm thankful to be here tonight. The Bosnia paradigm must be used as a memory and as a warning. I believe human beings are capable of understanding. God has given us the capacity to love, but we can also kill. And a lot depends on knowing and understanding.

As a Bosnian, I will conclude my remarks by imploring those who supported us to redouble their efforts. We would like to see more justice in Bosnia. Do not walk away. There's much more at stake than just the future of Bosnia.

May God be with us all.