



# Civil Resistance in Bosnia: Pressure for Truth and Reform

**Vanessa Ortiz**

Sr. Director for Civic and Field Learning  
International Center on Nonviolent Conflict

**Darko Brkan**

Organizer, Dosta!



# Civil Resistance in Emerging Democracies

- Builds citizen capacity, involvement and awareness.
- Provides a people-centered way to defend values of human rights, democracy, civil liberties, civic participation – civil society from below.
- Provides leadership and active civic roles to women when other political/economic spheres exclude them.
- Offers an alternative for peaceful dissent on issues among opposition groups.

## Case 1: Citizen Associations Created by the Victims of 1995 Genocide in Srebrenica

- **Mothers of Srebrenica and Zepa Enclave Movement:** Organized in 1996 and the most active and largest association of survivors of the 1995 massacre committed in the UN Safe Areas of Srebrenica and Zepa.
- **Women of Srebrenica, Tuzla:** Established and registered NGO in 1995. Tuzla has largest number of persons displaced from Podrinje. 11<sup>th</sup> of each month, peaceful protests in Tuzla.
- **Women of Podrinje, Sarajevo**
- **Srebrenica Mothers:** Today, over 2000 members of mothers who lost loved ones.

# References

**What Remains of Srebrenica? Motherhood, Transitional Justice and Yearning for the Truth.** Olivera Simic (PhD candidate, Melbourne Law School). *Journal of International Women's Studies*, Vol. 10, #4, May 2009.  
<http://www.bridgew.edu/SoAS/jiws/May09/OliveraMothers.pdf>

**Stories from No Land: The Women of Srebrenica Speak Out.** Selma Leyesdorff. *Human Rights Review*, April-June 2007.  
<http://www.springerlink.com/content/b77070662587w873/fulltext.pdf>

**Srebrenica Mothers: Return, Resist, Exist.**

**From Anger to Action: The Women of Srebrenica Organize.** Vanessa Ortiz, *In Women's Hands*, August 2010.  
<http://inwomenshands.wordpress.com/2010/08/03/srebrenica-mothers-exist-return-resist/>

# Women of Srebrenica



They have been portrayed as those “mad mothers of Srebrenica” who have had a history of clashes with police since 1996 and once even blocked the road to the coast (2000). One woman told me about a protest in 1996 in Tuzla, where they were told they were wild animals. All they had done was ask for information about their men at the Red Cross office.

– *Stories from No Land: The Women of Srebrenica Speak Out* (Selma Leydesdorff)

# Seeking the Truth in Srebrenica

. . . despite the challenges they faced, these women joined together and left their private sphere of mourning to go into the public domain demanding a series of actions to be taken by local and international governments. In doing so, they transformed their experience as victims into activism that has attracted international attention and respect.

Lobbying simultaneously for reconciliation and retributive justice makes the work of these women highly conflicting and complex.

-- *What Remains of Srebrenica? Motherhood, Transitional Justice and Yearning for the Truth*  
(by Olivera Simic)





# Primary Demands

- ① To uncover the full facts of Srebrenica – reveal and publicize.
- ② Exhume all graves and identify all bodies.
- ③ Immediate release of imprisoned survivors in Republic Srpska and Serbia/Montenegro.
- ④ Refugee right of return to Srebrenica.
- ⑤ Full and open international investigation of failure of UN to protect “Safe Areas.”
- ⑥ Arrest of all indicted and suspected war criminals, especially Radovan Kardzic and Ratko Mladic and Slobodan Milosovic, and be brought to trial.



# Nonviolent Methods

- Acts of Omission (withdraw of support; noncooperation):
  - Persona non grata activities and threats
  - Openly challenging structures and systems (naming and exposing officials)
  - Lawsuit against UN: safe havens did not prevent massacre
- Acts of Commission (pressure and disruption; intervention):
  - Protests, vigils, peace marches
  - Bulletins that name and shame organizations and individuals, explanation of terminology, publicize stories of survivors.
  - Publishing meeting notes to general public on int'l community decisions
  - Publicly exposing refugee issues and problems returnees face
  - Verify and witness mass grave exhumations and remains identification



# Successes

- Annual mass commemoration ceremony each year
- Resolution on Srebrenica adopted by European Parliament (Jan 2009)
  - 3 months after Srebrenica women's proposal – marking 11 July as annual day of mourning.
- Accountability in exhumation and identification process
- Continued pressure on Dutch government
- Continued pressure on Serbia and EU throughout EU membership process



## Case 2: Dosta!

- Movement formed in early 2006 by small group of activists; now in 15 cities in BiH with each chapter having its own leadership.
- Focus is on promoting government accountability and responsibility
- Attacking problems:
  - Passive citizens
  - Government corruption and crime
  - Ethnic hatred by challenging political fear tactics



# Dosta! Nonviolent Methods

- Acts of Omission (withdraw support; noncooperation):
  - Alternative social services
  - Labor union strikes
- Acts of Commission (pressure and disruption):
  - Protests against rising electricity rates
  - Protest campaigns ahead of elections
  - Silent marches against corruption
  - Petitions for resignation of corrupt local officials
  - Graffiti exposing Prime Minister corruption
  - Internet campaigns and Facebook mobilization
  - Road blockades
  - Street art, theater, concerts

# Silent March and Creative Protest





# Successes

- Increasing mobilization of youth (participation and action)
- Continued pressure on government to fight corruption
- Media visibility -- attention to local and national issues
- Resignation of Prime Minister in May 2009 by highlighting apartment purchase corruption (backfire on graffiti crackdown)
- Community service activities as a recruitment strategy.



*T-shirt reads: I Wrote the Graffiti*