General Assembly

Human Rights Council
Twenty-fifth session
Agenda item 3
Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development

Written statement* submitted by the Society for Threatened Peoples, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[18 February 2014]

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* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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A House in Visegrad, Bosnia and Herzegovina

On 21st January, 2014, the Serbian Municipality of Visegrad decided to send out police forces to prevent a public memorial service for the survivors of the genocide against Bosnian Muslims (Bosniaks) that took place in the eastern Bosnian town near the Drina river during the Bosnian war (1992-1995). More than a hundred masked special unit policemen were sent to the Muslim cemetery Strážišt morning to remove the word "genocide" from a commemorative plaque at the memorial site.

Before, on December 24, 2013, the city administration had ordered the demolition of a house in which Serbian troops had burned alive 70 women, children and elderly men. An international campaign was able to prevent the demolition. This politically-motivated act appeared intended to eliminate the memory of past crimes and dissuade members of the exiled former majority Bosniak/Bosnian Muslim community from exercising the right to return to Visegrad enshrined in the 1995 Dayton settlement of which the European Union is one of the international guarantors.

A representative of the Office of the High Representative (OHR) who has visited the site commented that he could see with his own eyes that there weren't any problems with the house and said that that the order of the municipal authorities to demolish the house on Pioneer Street gave representatives of the international community cause for concern. He said that time should be allowed for a proper legal review including the right to appeal.

In 1991, the municipality of Visegrad had 21,199 inhabitants, 63.5 percent of them Bosniaks. Today, there are less than 12,000 inhabitants. About 1,500 of them are Bosniaks who returned after the war. The Muslim people in Visegrad are trying to ensure that every Muslim grave stele on the cemetery bears the word "genocide".

Visegrad occupies a historically strategic location on the road from the garrison town of Uzice in Serbia to the Bosnian Serb wartime headquarters at Pale and the BiH capital Sarajevo. Some of the most terrible incidents of the Bosnian War took place in the town as the majority Bosniak/Bosnian Muslim population was terrorised into leaving. These included the Pionirska Ulica (Pionirska Street) and Bikavac fires in which approximately 150 elderly men, women and children as young as two days old were burned alive, mass rapes, murders and disappearances at Vilina Vlas and other local rape camps and brutal executions on Visegrad's UNESCO World Heritage Site Mehmet Pasha Sokolovic bridge.

The remains of the house at Pionirska Street have served as a physical reminder of the crime, a memorial to the victims and a focus for the commemoration ceremonies that every year bring back survivors and relatives dispersed elsewhere in Bosnia who are deterred from a more permanent return by a persistent atmosphere of hostility.

Society for Threatened Peoples urges the Human Rights Council to urge the European Union to:

• Ensure that the remains of the house at Pionirska Street can continue to serve as a physical reminder of the crime, a memorial to the victims and a focus for the commemoration ceremonies that every year bring back survivors and relatives dispersed elsewhere in Bosnia who are deterred from a more permanent return by a persistent atmosphere of hostility.