

Jasenovac: Unspoken Genocides and the Holocaust 1941 – 1945 Lecture and Exhibit in the United States Congress.

by Milos Rastovic

WASHINGTON, DC - On November 21, the Serb National Federation sponsored "Jasenovac: Unspoken Genocides and the Holocaust, 1941 – 1945" about Serbs, Jews, and Roma in the Independent State of Croatia (ISC) during World War II. The event took place in the Rayburn House Office Building of the United States Congress. This was a first lecture in the US Congress about this subject in the last 20 years.

Congressmen, senators, diplomats, foreign ambassadors, NGO and American media had an opportunity to learn more about this part of Serbian history during World War II. The event began with the documentary "Culture of Memories" by the National and University Library of Republika Srpska. This movie shows the testimonies and suffering of survivors of the concentration camps in the ISC during World War II. The audience watching the movie was horrified by the experiences of survivors.

Milos Rastovic, SNF Cultural Outreach Coordinator, warmly welcomed the guests and stressed the importance of the testimonies of survivors of the concentration camps: "For survivors, every remembering of the concentration camps is returning to hell and hard feelings in their thoughts where a person does not have any value. Today, there are a small number of survivors. They can help us to better understand the danger of mass killing, torturing, and genocides. We cannot ignore and close our eyes to those events. These events teach us about our past, help us to better understand our present, and to think about what can happen in the future. In 1984, the Serbian Patriarch German during the consecration of the church in Jasenovac said: 'We must forgive because it is a Gospel order, but not to forget.'"

Rastovic also mentioned the tragic experience of his own father Ilija Rastovic, poet, who was in a camp in fascist Hungary during World War II, as well as Jovanka Kovacevic Vlastelic, the survivor of Jasenovac and Stara Gradiska concentration camps as well as Jastrebarsko, the children's camp. As a nine-year-old child, Jovanka along with her sister Ljeposava, and other Serbian children were saved from the concentration camps by the indefatigable and courageous action of Diana Budisavljevic. Drina Rajic, daughter of Jovanka Kovacevic Vlastelic, was present at the event.

The lecture was delivered by Dragana Tomasevic, Founder and Director of the Jasenovac and Holocaust Memorial Foundation, London, the United Kingdom. During World War II, the ISC was on the territories of today's Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and partially Serbia. She used the context of 700 years of Serbian history to describe the suffering of Serbs, Jews, and Roma in the system of concentration camps in Jasenovac in the ISC during World War II: "All of which was negative, pathological, and criminal, which characterized the Croatian Ustasha movement as a whole, reached its peak in Jasenovac. With their sadism and pathological crimes, the Ustasha even managed to aghast visiting Nazi generals, who vividly kept reporting their shock and disgust to Hitler himself. Unlike the German camps where industrialized genocide was conducted, in the Jasenovac system of concentration camps genocide was done in a way unknown in recent history of the human race. Only in the Independent State of Croatia has there been witnessed a regression to the Middle Ages practice of killing victims by primitive and atavistic means - I don't want to get too graphic - but that included murdering with knife, saw, hammer, mallet, throwing half alive victims in the pits, impalement, crucifixion, burying as well as burning victims alive - which justifies term used often to describe these bestialities as 'Death Manufactory'. As such, they were completely different from the Nazi's 'Death Factories'.

"The Jasenovac system also included a special concentration camp for extermination of small children which was divided in subsections according to their age. Only the ISC formed concentration camps for children only - a unique phenomenon in the entire history of humankind. These concentration camps were partially led by Catholic Nuns who were murdering these children by food deprivation, torture, medical deprivation and brute force to name the few." She finished the lecture with the following: "The Serbian nation is very honorable, proud and although small has always stood side by side with the biggest and most powerful nations in the world in the greatest time of need, sustaining what a normal human mind cannot comprehend."

Many guests were surprised because some of those events were unknown to them. This lecture gave us more knowledge about those events during World War II and highlighted a hidden "unspoken" part of Serbian history for a Western audience and memory of survivors.

On behalf of the SNF, Rastovic received a Friendship Award from Ms. Tomasevic for the tireless effort to commemorate Serbs, Jews, and Roma victims of genocide during World War II. Rastovic thanked her for the award and stressed that the main mission of the SNF is to perpetuate Serbian culture, tradition, and history.

In addition to the lecture and movie, the exhibition "Anatomy of Oblivion" by the National and University Library of Republika Srpska was displayed in the Rayburn foyer in the for three days. Authors of the exhibition are Spomenka Kuzmanovic, Vanja Smulja, and Ljubica Milekic. The exhibition shows not only the suffering of people, methods of killing, but also information on the good people who rescued the prisoners in times of evil such as Dragica Habazin, Diana Budisavljevic, Tatjana Marinic, Kamilo Bresler, Jana Koch, and others. Congressmen and Senators had an opportunity to learn more about Serbian history. It is planned that this exhibition will travel throughout the United States.

A reception was held in the Republika Srpska Office for Cooperation, Trade and Investment where Obrad Kesic, Director, thanked everybody for participation at this important event.

The Serb National Federation sponsored this event in cooperation with the Republika Srpska Office for Cooperation, Trade and Investment, Washington, D.C., National and University Library of Republic of Srpska in Banja Luka, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Jasenovac and Holocaust Memorial Foundation, London, and the United Kingdom.



(from left to right): Milos Rastovic, Cultural Outreach Coordinator of the SNF, H.E. Mr. Bojan Vujic, Ambassador of Bosnia and Herzegovina to the U.S.A., and Obrad Kesic, Director of RS Office, at the Reception at RS Office



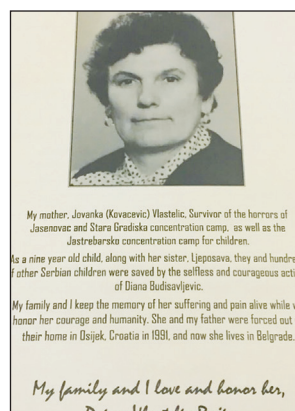
On behalf of the SNF, Milos Rastovic received a Friendship Award from Ms. Dragana Tomasevic



Milos Rastovic, Cultural Outreach Coordinator of the SNF



Ms. Dragana Tomasevic, Founder and Director of the Jasenovac and Holocaust Memorial Foundation, London, the UK



Jovanka Kovacevic Vlastelic, the survivor of the Jasenovac, and Stara Gradiska concentration camps as well as Jastrebarsko, the children's camp



Ilija Rastovic as a child with Milankov Family, who rescued his life, in Sombor, Serbia in 1943



The Exhibition "Anatomy of Oblivion" by the National and University Library of Republic of Srpska at the Rayburn Foyer in the United States Congress