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Remarks at the Bosnian Federation Signing Ceremony

March 18, 1994

President Clinton. President Izetbegovic, President Tudjman, Prime Minister Silajdzic, Mr. Zubak, the Secretary of State, Mr. Lake, the Vice President and I are happy to be joined by you, as well as by others here today. We have the Deputy Foreign Minister of Russia Vitali Churkin. Representing the European Union Troika, the Foreign Ministers of Greece, Mr. Papoulias; of Belgium, Mr. Claes; of Germany, Mr. Kinkel, and of course, David Owen and Thorvald Stoltenberg, who have been the cochairs of the international conference.

In addition to that, we're very pleased to be joined by the Ambassadors to the UNPROFOR nations who have been so active in working for peace and in preserving the peace, General Shalikashvili, Ambassador Albright, and Members of the Congress. In the front row, Senator Lugar, Senator Stevens, Senator Levin, Senator Hatch, Congressman Lantos, and I believe Congressman McCloskey is here. There he is in the second row. So we thank all of you for coming today.

We have come to bear witness to a moment of hope. For 33 months the flames of war have raged through the nations of the former Yugoslavia. By signing these agreements today, Bosnian and Croatian leaders have acted to turn back those flames and to begin the difficult process of reconciliation.

Around the globe the tension between ethnic identity and statehood presents one of the great problems of our time. But nowhere have the consequences been more tragic than in the former Yugoslavia. There nationalists and religious factions aggravated by Serbian aggression, have erupted in a fury of ethnic cleansing and brutal atrocity.

The agreements signed today offer one of the first clear signals that parties to this conflict are willing to end the violence and begin a process of reconstruction. The accords call for a federation between Muslims and Croats of Bosnia. This Muslim-Croat entity has agreed on the principles of a confederation with Croatia. Together these steps can help support the ideal of a multiethnic Bosnia and provide a basis for Muslims and Croats to live again in peace as neighbors and compatriots. The agreements are as important for Croatia's future as they are for Bosnia's. And it is the hope of all present today that the Serbs will join in this process toward peace as well.

These agreements are a testament to the perseverance and to the resolve of many people: the Croatian and Bosnian diplomats who kept probing for openings toward peace; the U.N. soldiers from many nations, here represented today, who have worked to bring both stability and humanitarian supplies; the NATO pilots who have helped put our power in the service of diplomacy.

I want to praise the leadership and courage of those who have come to Washington to sign these agreements, especially President Izetbegovic and President Tudjman. I also want to recognize the tireless efforts of Thorvald Stoltenberg and David Owen and, of course, our own Cy Vance, who is not here today, and especially to express my personal appreciation to the skilled diplomacy of Ambassador Charles Redman. Thank you, sir, for your work.

All of these people have done much to bring us to this point of agreement. Through Ambassador Redman's efforts and in many other ways, our administration has worked with our NATO allies, the European Union, Russia, the U.N. and others to help end this conflict. The fact that we have done this work together has made a significant difference. And to the Deputy Foreign Minister of Russia, I say a special thank you, sir, for your renewed energy in this area and our common hopes.

We have engaged in this work because the United States has clear interests at stake, an interest in helping prevent the spread of a wider war in Europe, an interest in showing that NATO remains a credible force for peace, and interest in helping to stem the terrible, destabilizing flows of refugees this struggle is generating, and perhaps clearly, a humanitarian interest we all share in stopping the continuing slaughter of innocents in Bosnia.

The documents signed here are only first steps, but they are clearly steps in the right direction. If they lead to an overall negotiated settlement, if a lasting peace takes hold in

this war-torn land, the ceremony will be remembered as an important event. Whether that comes to pass will depend less on our words today than on the actions of Muslims, Croats, and Serbs on the ground tomorrow and in the days to come.

For while documents like these can define the parameters of peace, the people of the region themselves must create that peace. Economic, political, and security arrangements for the new federation must be given a chance to work. The ceasefire between Croats and Bosnian Government forces must hold. Croats and Muslims who have fought with such intensity must now apply that same intensity to restoring habits of tolerance and coexistence.

The issue of the Petrinja region of Croatia must be resolved. Serbia and the Serbs of Bosnia cannot sidestep their own responsibility to achieve an enduring peace.

The new progress toward peace will likely come under attack by demagogs, by rogue riflemen, by all those who believe they can profit most from continued violence, aggression, and human suffering. Such attacks must be met with the same steadiness and leadership that have produced these agreements today.

Neither the United States nor the international community can guarantee the success of this initiative. But the U.S. has stood by the parties as they have taken risks for peace, and we will continue to do so. I have told Presidents Izetbegovic and Tudjman that the U.S. is prepared to contribute to the economic reconstruction that will bolster these agreements. And as I have said before, if an acceptable, enforceable settlement can be reached, the U.S. is prepared through NATO to help implement it.

All across Bosnia and Croatia communities and entire peoples were once connected by ancient bridges, like the great stone arch in Mostar, which for centuries stood as the city's proud symbol. Today, too many of those bridges have been reduced to rubble or closed by force. The challenge for parties to this conflict is to rebuild the bonds that those bridges represent. The announcement that Sarajevo's bridge of brotherhood and unity soon will reopen is a hopeful sign that the parties can begin to span the divide of hatred and violence.

The work ahead is indeed daunting, but all of us in the international community are committed to help. Together, let us strive for peace.

Thank you.

Mr. Papoulias, the Foreign Minister of Greece, representing the European Union.

Foreign Minister Karolos Papoulias. Mr. President, Mr. President Tudjman, President Izetbegovic. The European Union warmly welcomes the agreement on the constitutional character for the future federation between the Croats and the Muslims of Bosnia-Herzegovina. This is a significant success coming shortly after the framework agreement signed in Washington on the first of March.

It is also a further step towards attaining a comprehensive solution in Bosnia-Herzegovina with the participation of the Bosnian Serbs, thus, safeguarding the territorial integrity of the country.

We congratulate the negotiators for obtaining results in such a brief time. We recognize that this would not have been possible without the active involvement of the United States administration.

Mr. President, the European Union has for some time now insisted that your country's involvement is crucial if a solution in Bosnia-Herzegovina and throughout ex-Yugoslavia is to be reached. We on our part have already covered a lot of ground. The two cochairmen of the International Conference on Yugoslavia have obtained, after lengthy negotiations, the agreement of the three parties on an important number of issues.

We believe that the understandings, especially on territorial percentages, should constitute the basis for further negotiations if we wish to achieve decisive progress soon. Moreover, our intention to contribute substantially to the implementation of an overall agreement by providing ground forces is still valid. So is our offer to obtain an administrator at a united Mostar for a period of up to 2 years.

Today's success reinforces the progress achieved during the last weeks towards a definite end of hostilities through the withdrawal of heavy artillery from Sarajevo, the

lifting of most obstacles to the flow of humanitarian aid, and the return, as far as is possible, of the population of Bosnia-Herzegovina to normal life.

In order to maintain the momentum, the European Union has already promised to dispatch additional forces for the strengthening of UNPROFOR in Bosnia.

From here on, we have to work hard, so that today's results are followed by further progress. We look forward to working closely together with the United States, Russia, and other countries involved, as well as with all parties to the problem.

Ex-Yugoslavia is a part of Europe. It is our responsibility and duty to participate actively in the efforts to achieve a peace settlement. Our presence here underlines our determination and our commitment.

Thank you.

President Alija Izetbegovic. Mr. President Clinton, Mr. Tudjman, Mr. Vice President Gore, Mr. Secretary, ladies and gentlemen, dear friends, particularly my friends from the Senate and the Congress of the United States, as well as many others who are present here and who have contributed to the signing of documents today, this is a great day for Bosnia-Herzegovina, but also to all those who are opposed to war—and peace between people. The document signed today is the result of the efforts of all people present here. I give them my thanks.

I am sure that all our friends, both in East and West, join me in expressing my gratefulness. Mr. Clinton, as well as Mr. Secretary, you have given a great contribution to what is happening today. The negotiations that led to the signing of this document have given this great result. The situation in Bosnia has improved. There are fewer victims.

Unfortunately, it is only occurring at one part of our country. Fighting continues around Brcko and Maglaj, and there is bad news from Brcko as well. There were some new conflicts in other areas of Bosnia. This means that our efforts for peace must continue without hesitation.

Our people want only two things, peace and justice. Or as they like to say, they like fair peace. Fair peace means that our country will keep its borders, and the villages and the cities from which our people have been expelled will be able to resettle the refugees. Those who are responsible for war crimes will have to be brought to justice.

The most unfortunate of our people are our refugees and some of our member citizens which live in Sandjak. The refugees must return to their homes, and the violence in Sandjak must cease.

From Mr. Clinton's speech, I understood that the United States is ready to give their contribution to implementation of the peace agreement and reconstruction of our country. We accept this information with gratefulness and with pleasure. I pray to God to help our people as well as other people who fight for freedom and peace.

Thank you.

President Franjo Tudjman. Mr. Clinton, President Izetbegovic, Ladies and gentleman, the Republic of Croatia and the entire Croatian nation place the highest value on the efforts of the United States and of President Clinton in reaching the agreements of the formation of a Croatian-Bosnia federation and the further confederation with the Republic of Croatia. The signing of this Washington agreement marks a crucial turning point in the crisis in this region. And the positive outcome would not have been possible without decisive measures undertaken by the United States of America.

The historic step which has been taken today will be of immense mutual benefit for Croats and Bosniac Muslims, laying a strong foundation for lasting peace and a stable future in this region and assuring for both peoples full national sovereignty and full parity of equality in all state affairs. The further alliance with the Republic of Croatia guarantees the Bosniac Muslims prosperity in the federation, and so confederal ties with Croatia in a close association with the Western democracies.

However, in order to address adequately the widespread human and material destruction suffered by both republics, determined support is critical to restore a decent standard of living enabling the rebuilding of the historic areas and to return the displaced and the refugees to their homes. We look to the United States and the international community to assist us in these burdens so that the

harsh conditions under which our citizens continue to suffer can be alleviated.

The Republic of Croatia continues to care for the largest number of refugees and displaced persons, relative to population, in the world. It is our hope that these agreements, coupled with the commitment of the international community, will create the conditions necessary for lasting peace and the return to normal and productive life for all our citizens.

The Republic of Croatia wishes full integration into regional European economic and security systems, as well as comprehensive cooperation with other international institutions, all of which will contribute to the success of our endeavors. Croatia strives as well to be a major factor of stability for the new international order in this part of Europe.

In closing, I would like to emphasize that the Republic of Croatia has always looked to the United States of America as the backbone of democracy and the pillar of the free and stable world and deeply appreciates its effort in this important step taken today.

Thank you.

President Clinton. Mr. Zubak.

Mr. Kresimir Zubak. Mr. President, ladies and gentleman. Croatian people in Bosnia-Herzegovina are of the opinion that this senseless war in Bosnia-Herzegovina must cease. Croatian people want to organize Bosnia-Herzegovina as a free democratic modern state community where equal people live. Our people have accepted the peace initiative, which with a contribution from European Union was started by United States of America.

Signing these documents today, we accept the responsibility to that which was negotiated during the negotiations—to implement that which was negotiated. And we will work towards organizing the federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina as soon as possible. And we will also strive to organize the confederation with the Republic of Croatia as soon as possible.

I thank you, Mr. President, all your colleagues, for the help that you have extended to us so far. And I express hope that you will help us to organize the state community and the whole territory, and also that you will help us to stop the war in the territory of Bosnia-Herzegovina, and that you will also help us in reconstructing the war and life in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Thank you once again.

President Clinton. Ladies and gentlemen, today we have witnessed an act of great statesmanship. Now we must hope that the courage embodied by these agreements will inspire further acts of reason, reconstruction and progress to implement them, to make them real in the lives of the people whose leaders are represented here today.

We also must hope, I will say again, that the Serbs will join in this effort for a wider peace. We invite them and urge them to do so.

Over 150 years ago, the Balkan poet, Ivan Jukic, wrote the following line, ''Only those are heroes who know how to live with their brothers.'' Let us hope we are beginning to learn that lesson in this troubled land.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9 a.m. in Room 450 of the Old Executive Office Building. In his remarks, he referred to Kresimir Zubak, representative of the Bosnian Croats; Greek Foreign Minister Karolos Papoulias, Belgian Foreign Minister Willy Claes, and German Foreign Minister Klaus Kinkel, representing European Union Troika; Lord David Owen and Thorvald Stoltenberg, Cochairmen, International Conference on the Former Yugoslavia; Cyrus Vance, former Cochairman of the International Conference on the Former Yugoslavia; and Ambassador Charles Redman, U.S. Special Envoy for the Former Yugoslavia. Foreign Minister Papoulias spoke in Greek, President Izetbegovic spoke in Bosniac, and Mr. Zubak spoke in Croatian, and their remarks were translated by an interpreter.

Statement on Earthquake Assistance to California

March 18, 1994

The people of southern California are responding courageously to the challenge of restoring their lives and their communities in the wake of the earthquake. From the first day, our administration has been working extremely hard to fulfill the Federal Government's obligation to help make that possible.

This new assistance reflects new costs that have come to our attention in recent weeks. My administration is continuing to monitor