



Home / News

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Local Bosnians move forward on 23rd anniversary of genocide

By AARON MUDD amudd@bgdailynews.com Jul 12, 2018

Local Bosnians joined with Western Kentucky University officials Wednesday, the 23rd anniversary of a Bosnian genocide, to discuss ways to move the country forward.

“We need to give these people hope,” said Amer Salihovic, who was a baby when Serbian forces overran the United Nations safe zone in Srebrenica, ultimately killing 8,372 Muslim Bosniaks, mainly men and boys.

Salihovic spoke as part of a panel at this year’s Walk to Remember Srebrenica Symposium at WKU’s Kentucky Museum.

He was joined by Brent Bjorkman, director of the Kentucky Museum; Addie Cheney, assistant director of the Office of International Programs; Jenn Brinkley, an assistant professor of paralegal studies; Sedin Agic, the imam at the Islamic Center of Bowling Green; and Sabina Husic, a survivor of Srebrenica.

The symposium was held in conjunction with this year's Walk to Remember Srebrenica. Beginning at 4 p.m. Saturday at Circus Square Park, local Bosnians will gather to remember the victims of violence in Bosnia and Herzegovina, along with genocides around the world.

The symposium also featured a screening of "Bad Blood" a documentary produced by Bosnian-American filmmaker Rialda Zukic that chronicle's Zukic's return to Srebrenica in 2014.

Upon returning to the town where she was born, Zukic discovers a community with high youth unemployment and young people grappling with a history of violence. Her camera lens takes the viewer into rooms still stained with blood and to funerals for Bosniak victims where grief remains raw. It unveils a town that used to be majority-Bosniak but is now 80 percent Serbian.

"The way that things stand now in the region is there is a lot of propaganda in the media. There's a lot of propaganda in the schools still today," Husic said. "There are those who deny what happened, and it's up to us to sort of spread that message within the region but also here."

Indeed, many panelists stressed education and remembrance as solutions.

Agic urged people to recognize genocides around the world and held up eight pages of information on massacres since World War II. "If you forget it, it will repeat again," he said.

Salihovic stressed the need to restore hope for peace to Bosnia's youth.

"Why doesn't a single one of my friends believe that it's possible?" he asked. "Where did that hope go?"



While much work needs to be done, progress is being made in some areas.

Brinkley said the country has taken positive steps, such as passing gender equality and anti-sexual harassment laws. And through her documentary, Zukic observed a younger generation that's comparatively more tolerant.

However, that feeling of uneasiness and fear is still very real for many Bosniaks.

After watching some of the social scenes in "Bad Blood" during which Bosniaks mingle with Serbs, Husic said she couldn't see herself riding in a car with Serbs. She said trust is hard to regain from those who used to be neighbors.

Husic also suggested that Bosniaks should advocate for other marginalized groups and referred to immigrant families recently separated at the U.S. border.

Francisco Serrano, a Bowling Green native, appreciated how the event shed light on a dark time in history. As someone who's lost his brother through deportation, he knows what family separation feels like.

"I was able to learn a lot more about my Bosnian friends," said Serrano, who has grown up in Bowling Green with friends who carry scars to this day.

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Aaron Mudd

Education reporter. Covers education and related issues, focusing primarily on the Bowling Green and Warren County public school districts and Western Kentucky University.