

Teacher information sheet

Genocide in Bosnia



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The population of Bosnia and Herzegovina (referred to as 'Bosnia' here) consists of:

- **Bosniaks** – Bosnian Muslims
- **Bosnian Serbs** – Serb Orthodox Christians who have close cultural ties with neighbouring Serbia
- **Bosnian Croats** – Roman Catholics who have close cultural ties with neighbouring Croatia



Flag of Bosnia, adopted in 1998

Bosnia's history

Between 1991-1994 Yugoslavia disintegrated into five states – Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia, Macedonia and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (later known as Serbia and Montenegro).

Bosnia declared independence in 1992. This was resisted by the Bosnian Serb population who saw their future as part of 'Greater Serbia', sparking a civil war over land.

The Bosnian War

Bosnia became the victim of the Bosnian Serbs' wish for political domination, which they were prepared to achieve by isolating ethnic groups and, if necessary, exterminating them.

A campaign of war crimes, 'ethnic cleansing' and genocide was perpetrated by Bosnian Serb troops under the orders of Slobodan Milošević. Sarajevo, the capital city of Bosnia, was under siege for nearly four years - the longest siege in modern warfare. The Serb-controlled army surrounded the city, bombing it, killing more than 10,000 people and destroying cultural monuments.

Persecution

From 1991, in Prijedor, north-west Bosnia, non-Serbs were forced to wear white armbands and certain newspapers, radio stations and television stations began to broadcast anti-Croat and anti-Bosniak propaganda.

Non-Serbs were sent to concentration camps which had been set up in mid-1992. Women were taken to Trnopolje camp where systematic rape took place on a regular basis.

Around 3,500 people, mainly men, were held in inhumane conditions in the Omarska Camp, the largest of the concentration camps. The prisoners were given one meal per day and violence from the camp officers was widespread. Living conditions were atrocious, with suffocation caused by overcrowding being a constant threat to the prisoners. The camp was closed in August 1992 after a visit from foreign journalists.

The genocide

The town of Srebrenica (pronounced Sreb-ren-eet-za) in east Bosnia was a key area that the Serbs wanted to gain control of, in order to create a continuous state of 'Greater Serbia'.

On 16 April 1993, the United Nations Security Council declared that Srebrenica was a 'safe area' and called for the area to be free from armed attacks. In spite of this regular shelling continued from the Bosnian Serbs.



In July 1995, tens of thousands of Bosniaks had taken refuge in Srebrenica. They were under the protection of Dutch UN troops, and fresh food and water were in short supply. The Bosnian Serb army led by Ratko Mladić entered Srebrenica. Bosniak women and children were deported on trucks and buses.

Over several days 8,000 of the remaining Bosniak (Bosnian Muslim) men and boys were murdered in and around Srebrenica. The genocidal massacre at Srebrenica remains the single largest mass murder in Europe since World War Two.

Bosnia today

Almost half of Bosnia's population was displaced by the war, and there are still challenges in Bosnia today following the genocide. These include:

- Many Bosnians fled to other countries and as many communities in Bosnia are still very divided they don't feel safe to return
- The genocide is not acknowledged in a lot of areas of Bosnian civic life and society, and denial of the genocide persists
- Justice has taken a long time to achieve and legal cases are still ongoing
- There remains little trust between Bosnian Serbs, Bosnian Muslims and Croats

Slobodan Milošević remained in power until 2000. In 2002 he was charged with committing Crimes Against Humanity and genocide. He died of a heart attack in custody before a verdict could be reached.

Other individuals were tried and sentenced by The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, which was set up by the UN in response to the atrocities committed.

Find out more...

Genocide in Bosnia: hmd.org.uk/bosnia

Other information for teachers: hmd.org.uk/education

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hmd.org.uk
enquiries@hmd.org.uk

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Learning from genocide - for a better future