

SPEECH OF PROF.DR. EKMELEDDİN İHSANOĞLU, DIRECTOR GENERAL OF THE
RESEARCH CENTRE FOR ISLAMIC HISTORY, ART AND CULTURE (IRCICA)
AT THE INAUGURATION OF THE EXHIBITION
"PHOTOGRAPHS OF BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA"

IRCICA, Istanbul
June 12, 1993

The ongoing war in the middle of Europe, the cradle of democracy, has marked the twentieth century with one of the most tragic events in history. While the human, national and cultural assets of Bosnia-Herzegovina are destroyed by Serbian attacks, the international community's failure to stop this tragedy reduced the hopes for a peaceful global order. After the end of the cold war based on an equilibrium of mutual threat and with the spread of the free market system from the beginning of the 1990's, it was expected that a new world order would be established, bringing peace and mutual understanding among peoples. However, it is observed that ethnic and religious diversities, repressed in the previous period, came to the fore as strong forces. Conflicts arose in various parts of the world between peoples of different ethnic and religious origins. The worst consequence of such enmities is the tragic war in Bosnia-Herzegovina. To date, nearly two hundred thousand people were killed, hundreds of thousands wounded, one million forced from their homes, and eighty percent of an old cultural and architectural heritage was destroyed.

Having lived at the crossroads of many cultures and civilisations for centuries, the Bosnian people acquired a particular identity which is a blend of characteristics inherited from various national and religious origins. Bosnia's intellectual and religious history, its cultural and architectural heritage show a unity in diversity. Muslims, Catholics, Orthodox and Jewish people lived here in harmony, especially under the Ottoman rule. The mosques, churches and shrines, schools, monasteries and markets of Bosnia-Herzegovina testify to the past harmonious coexistence of these people. Extermination policies against the non-Serbian population also destroy these historical evidences. These policies give a most dreadful example of how peace and order are destroyed in the pursuit of fanatic ideals.

This exhibition comprises original photographs showing part of the destroyed cultural and architectural heritage of Bosnia-Herzegovina. It is the by-product of a comprehensive project undertaken by our Centre from the beginning of the war. A few years ago, the Centre had started studies on the written and architectural assets of the Islamic cultural heritage in the Balkans and southeast Europe. Those studies regarding Bosnia-Herzegovina gained momentum after the foundation of the Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina, and new prospects appeared after the visit of H.E. Alija Izzetbegovic, President of the Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina to our Centre in July 1991. But unfortunately, when the war broke out our studies were necessarily directed to another purpose, that of assessing and making known an old and rich cultural heritage torn in the war.

Our Centre made contacts with pertinent institutions in the OIC member countries and around the world, as well as with Unesco, to increase the awareness and mobilise efforts so that this war can be stopped and the human and cultural heritage of Bosnia-Herzegovina can be saved. The Centre tried to draw the attention of the world opinion to this issue by publishing first-hand information collected on the spot and from Bosnian government officials. Within its sphere of activity, our Centre has been one of the first international institutions to take steps in this direction.

I would like to brief you on our Centre's studies in the framework of its project concerning Bosnia-Herzegovina. One activity has been the publication of a special issue of IRCICA Newsletter, with messages from H.E. President Izzetbegovic and H.E. Dr.Hamid Algabid, Secretary General of the OIC. On the other hand, this exhibition prepared with the

contributions of the Ministry of Culture of Turkey was organised for the first time in Pakistan, during the 21st Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers held on April 25-29, 1993. The Foreign Ministers of Islamic countries attending the conference adopted a resolution expressing appreciation of the Centre's activities concerning Bosnia-Herzegovina. The Foreign Ministers also requested IRCICA to take necessary steps for the assessment of the damage made to the cultural heritage of Bosnia-Herzegovina and to make preparations, in cooperation with the International Commission for the Preservation of Islamic Cultural Heritage and Unesco, to ensure that this cultural and architectural heritage be restored and revived.

In accordance with this resolution of the Foreign Ministers of OIC Member States, the project concerning the cultural and architectural heritage of Bosnia-Herzegovina is considered as one of the Centre's priority projects directed to different geographic regions. This project is carried out by two scholars from Bosnia-Herzegovina who are staff members of the Centre. In general terms, studies are conducted on two major aspects of the subject, namely cultural history and architectural history. Publishing reference works in these fields is a major objective of the project.

At the same time, a documentary system is envisaged, to store information and documents on the written and architectural products of Bosnia-Herzegovina's culture and civilisation. The main purpose is to assist interested researchers by providing basic references. Similarly, the Centre's library tries to enlarge its collection on this subject. As published in previous issues of the Newsletter, the Institute of Oriental Studies in Sarajevo and other destroyed libraries and archives contained tens of thousands of valuable historical documents. These documents disappeared in the war together with the products of academic studies done in different fields of science. The majority of what remains from this heritage is now outside of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Studies and documents on the history, the economic, social and artistic life of the country are either with Bosnians who went abroad or with other researchers who worked on these subjects. Therefore, it becomes a duty to bring together these references, including the manuscript and printed works on Bosnia-Herzegovina as well as the plans and photographs of destroyed monuments. Efforts should be made in this direction, to establish contacts, cooperation and an international teamwork with scholars and researchers of Bosnia and other countries who studied different aspects of Bosnian history and culture.

Parallel to these activities, we shall try, in cooperation with universities and research centres in the Islamic countries and around the world, to seek possibilities to encourage postgraduate studies on the history, culture and architecture of Bosnia-Herzegovina. And, wishing that the war will end soon, we shall be ready to collaborate, with the information and experience available, with those institutions and personalities who can contribute in rebuilding the cultural and architectural heritage of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Our colleague Dr. Amir Pasic from Mostar University, will inform you on technical aspects of the subject in his conference on "Architecture in Bosnia-Herzegovina".

Before concluding, I would like to express our gratitude to the Ministry of Culture of Turkey for their contribution to the preparation of this exhibition.

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Ministry of Culture of Turkey was organized in the Ministry of Culture of Turkey during the 1st Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers held on April 22-23, 1981. The Foreign Ministers of Islamic countries attending the conference adopted the following resolution:

The Foreign Ministers also requested UNESCO to take necessary steps for the preservation of the cultural heritage of Bosnia-Herzegovina and to make preparations for cooperation with the International Commission for the Preservation of Islamic Cultural Heritage and UNESCO to ensure that this cultural and architectural heritage be restored and preserved.

In accordance with the resolution of the Foreign Ministers of OIC Member States, the project concerning the cultural and architectural heritage of Bosnia-Herzegovina is considered as one of the Centre's priority projects directed to different geographic regions. This project is carried out by two scholars from Bosnia-Herzegovina who are staff members of the Centre. In general terms, studies are conducted on two major aspects of the subject, namely cultural history and architectural history. Publishing reference works in these fields is a major objective of the project.

At the same time, a documentary system is envisaged to store information and documents on the written and architectural products of Bosnia-Herzegovina's culture and civilization. The main purpose is to assist interested researchers by providing basic references. Similarly, the Centre's library tries to enlarge its collection on this subject. As published in previous issues of the Newsletter, the Institute of Oriental Studies in Sarajevo and other destroyed libraries and archives contained tens of thousands of valuable historical documents. These documents disappeared in the war together with the products of academic studies done in different fields of science. The majority of what remains from this heritage is now outside of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Studies and documents on the history, the economic, social and artistic life of the country are either with foreigners who work abroad or with other researchers who worked on these subjects. Therefore, it becomes a duty to bring together these references, including the manuscript and printed works on Bosnia-Herzegovina as well as the plans and photographs of destroyed monuments. Plans should be made in this direction to establish contacts, cooperation and an international network with scholars and researchers of Bosnia and other countries who studied different aspects of Bosnia's history and culture.

Parallel to these activities, we shall try, in cooperation with universities and research centres in the Islamic countries and around the world, to seek possibilities to encourage postgraduate studies on the history, culture and architecture of Bosnia-Herzegovina. And, wishing that the work will be good, we shall be ready to collaborate with the information and experience available with those institutions and personalities who can contribute in rebuilding the cultural and architectural heritage of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Our colleague Dr. Amir Pasic from Mostar University will inform you on technical aspects of the subject in his contribution in 'Achievements in Bosnia-Herzegovina'.

Before concluding, I would like to express our gratitude to the Ministry of Culture of Turkey for their contribution to the preparation of this exhibition.