



Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission Briefing

The International Tribunal and Beyond: Pursuing Justice for Atrocities in the Western Balkans

Tuesday, December 12, 2017

10:00 – 11:00 AM

2255 Rayburn House Office Building

Opening Remarks as prepared for delivery

- Good morning and welcome to the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission, and the Helsinki Commission's joint briefing on International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and the state of accountability for atrocities committed during the 1990s Balkan wars.
- I would like to thank our panelists for coming here today to share their expertise with us.
- While many date the Balkan wars to the secession of Slovenia and Croatia from Yugoslavia in 1991, it is worth noting that in the late 1980s, Slobodan Milosevic, at that time the President of the Serbian Republic within Yugoslavia, used demagoguery against the Albanian population in Kosovo to his own political ends – the beginning of the ethnic and nationalist extremism that would soon violently flare up throughout the region.
- Tom Lantos, the namesake of the Commission I co-chair, was one of the first members of Congress to draw attention to the plight of the Kosovar Albanians in the 1980s, as was Senator Bob Dole.
- The Balkan wars started in Croatia and spread to engulf Bosnia and eventually Kosovo.
- Some saw the complexities of the Balkan ethnic groups, warring factions, and history and, feeling overwhelmed, decided to decry “a pox on all their houses” and avoid U.S. attempts to stop the conflict.

- This certainly seemed an easier path than to attempt to seek a meaningful investigation into the atrocities and ensure that at least the worst perpetrators would face trial and their victims find justice.
- But Tom Lantos, Bob Dole, and others – including my Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission colleague, Eliot Engel – continued to draw attention to atrocities committed in these wars and demand justice.
- Because of the work of those men and others, Members of Congress from both parties have closely followed the actions and efforts of ICTY since its founding in 1993.
- It is also why I, Co-Chair McGovern, and Rep. Engel are co-sponsors of a bill introduced by Rep. Virginia Foxx, H. R. 3851, the War Crimes Rewards Expansion Act, which would provide for rewards for the arrest or conviction of certain foreign nationals who have committed genocide or war crimes, even if those arrested are tried in national courts rather than international tribunals.
- The ICTY isn't perfect, but it remains a model with lessons to teach.
- As Tom Lantos remarked during the 10-year commemoration of the massacre at Srebrenica, “it is essential that we recommit ourselves to seek justice for the victims, well-deserved punishment for the perpetrators, and commit ourselves to take all possible action to assure that such atrocities do not again occur in Bosnia or in Rwanda or in Darfur, or indeed any place on this small planet.”
- I look forward to hearing from our panel of experts.