

## Foreword

Bosnia was one of the toughest challenges I faced as President. In 1995, I addressed the nation, describing the situation: *For nearly four years a terrible war has torn Bosnia apart. Horrors we prayed had been banished from Europe forever have been seared into our minds again. Skeletal prisoners caged behind barbed-wire fences, women and girls raped as a tool of war, defenseless men and boys shot down into mass graves, evoking visions of World War II concentration camps and endless lines of refugees marching toward a future of despair.* Bosnia was a small spot on the map of the world where humanitarian and geopolitical considerations collided, forcing the conscience of a superpower to come to grips with its role in the world.

As the war raged in Bosnia, Swanee Hunt, serving as our ambassador to Austria, brought to my attention news not making headlines: that the women of Bosnia had been organizing to try to prevent the war, and they were still doing everything they could, even in the face of ruthless “ethnic cleansing,” to hold together their culturally diverse communities. She came to me again in early 1996, right after the Dayton Peace Agreement was signed, to discuss the bridge-building work of those women. I immediately recognized a good idea and was proud to announce a few months later a \$5 million start-up contribution by the U.S. government to a new Bosnian Women’s Initiative. Through training and microcredit loans, that program has enabled many war-weary women to improve their families’ situations, and, at the same time, help regenerate a ravaged economy.

The United States supported numerous other endeavors, public and private, to promote lasting peace and prosperity in Bosnia. Whether in economic activity, democracy building, or cultural exchange, our assistance has aided those who believe in bringing people together rather than dividing them. We Americans enjoy a great many privileges, but we also have a responsibility to be true to the values behind those privileges whenever and wherever we can. It’s in our best interest.

Women must be included in this work. Coming out of a vicious war in which so many men were killed in the fighting, Bosnia's future may depend more than ever on its women. A democracy functions best when *all* its citizens are engaged. Replacing tyranny with justice, healing deep scars, exchanging hatred for hope . . . the women in *This Was Not Our War* teach us how. Peace isn't an event, it's a process—and as the Middle East and Northern Ireland have shown us, it doesn't always move forward. These women inspire us with their courage to hope. In return, we owe it to them to help them lock in their gains and keep their momentum.

I keep near me in my office the following lines of verse by Seamus Heaney, which I have repeated often around the world:

*History says, Don't hope  
On this side of the grave.  
But then, once in a lifetime  
The longed-for tidal wave  
Of justice can rise up,  
And hope and history rhyme.*

*So hope for a great sea-change  
On the far side of revenge.  
Believe that a further shore  
Is reachable from here.  
Believe in miracles  
And cures and healing wells.*

With those words in mind, I think of Slobodan Milosevic and others indicted for crimes against humanity in The Hague. And while, yes, that looks as if it's a miraculous achievement, much work still remains to be done in Bosnia at the grassroots. Peace is built every day through ordinary exchanges and events. The women of *This Was Not Our War* know that, as they know unity and strength can come from diversity, that it's possible to honor their distinctive traditions and still relish life with their neighbors, and that the source of lasting peace is the human heart. I salute their foresight and their courage, their action and resolve. In their stories, we read the history of humankind. In their vision, we glimpse possibilities for our future.

WILLIAM JEFFERSON CLINTON





Civilian targets. Bus outside the Sarajevo maternity clinic, in the line of fire of Serbs shelling from the surrounding hills. December 1995.