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October 6, 1999

Zagreb, Croatia

I arrived in Zagreb, Croatia yesterday morning to attend the verdict and sentencing of Dinko Sakic, the commander of the Jasenovac concentration camp (the Auschwitz of the Balkans). As you have probably heard, a seven-member panel found him guilty on all five counts and sentenced him to the maximum term of 20 years. This being the first war-criminal trial in post-communist country, it should be noted that he was tried for crimes against humanity, and not for genocide which would have carried a more severe sentence.

Sakic, unrepentant to the very end said at the trials' closing, "I have no guilty conscience whatsoever." The last known living commander of a World War II concentration camp claimed that he was following orders, and did what he did for Croatia. During the trial he mocked the witnesses, and on one occasion laughed at the testimony. Chief Judge Drazen Tripolo, who ran a disciplined trial, censured him for his outrageous behavior.

More than 85,000 inmates died under the fascist Ustashe regime between 1941 and 1945. Sakic, 78, was convicted of being responsible of the murder of 2000 inmates while he was commander. Four witnesses testified that Sakic personally shot Milo Boskovic, a prisoner at Jasenovac. In a poignant moment outside the courtroom, Milo's brother, now living in Serbia, thanked Efraim Zuroff for his efforts in bringing Sakic to justice.

Dr. Zuroff was the major catalyst in having Sakic extradited from Argentina and in bringing him to trial. In March, as the trial was about to begin, I observed Dr. Zuroff's modus operandi then, as well as now. His presence at the beginning of the trial served as a moral compass for the country. By the time of the verdict, he acted as Croatia's conscience. The judge stated what Effie Zuroff has been saying for years, that the passage of time in no way diminishes the crime or changes the need to bring these criminals to justice.

It is my hope that this process and the outcome of this trial causes Croatia to confront its heretofore unexplored past. The country desperately needs collective psychoanalysis. I would be satisfied with some minor therapy. Outside the courtroom, members of the extreme right, relics of a darker time, expressed outrage at the verdict, and clicked the Ustashe salute. Some physically jostled, and in one case spat at a well-known local human rights activist, Zoran Pucic. One vocal and articulate bystander harassed us and screeched, "Let the Jews solve their own problems first. What about the one million Arabs that they displaced?" Leaders of the Jewish

community expressed concern over the numerous hate phone calls they had received, and the onslaught that they expected in the coming days. While many of Croatia's citizens applauded the outcome, a significant segment of the population see this as an acquiescence to the world Jewish community's enormous influence and power. It's where the Croatians go from here that bears watching. Do they utilize this momentous episode in their history to make the changes in their society, to reflect upon their history, and to face the truth of their recent past? Or do they view this trial as a "one time shot" because the world was watching and revert to what, I deem, a paranoid, and xenophobic state of being.

In an official meeting earlier today with Dr. Zvonimir Separovic, the Minister of Justice, Dr. Zuroff and I offered suggestions on steps that other countries have taken to rid themselves of the bane of racism. He listened politely but gave no indication of any serious interest. In a short press briefing afterward, his focus was on some fishermen that saved Jews during World War II. No mention of the significant issues.

One final point. I am often asked why I bother with these old men and their crimes of some 55 years ago. Firstly, the passage of time does not heal the psychic wounds of the survivors, nor ease the pain of the demise of the six million. The majority of the tens of thousands of murderers of our people lived out their lives in comfort, without any retribution whatsoever. For those few individuals whom we manage to bring to trial, we must use all our resources and efforts to insure that justice is meted out. Let the world know, that though genocide has and continues to be a factor in many epochs of human history, that if ever the Jews are once again to be a target, the aggressors will be hunted down until the end of time. Unlike some other peoples, Jews have a long memory, and they will insure that the stain of their crime will haunt the perpetrators' history forever. And finally, I remember the 1_ million children, and I think of my own children. And that alone is enough of a reason.

For background purposes, please see my letter of March 8, 1999, when I flew to Zagreb for the opening of the trial (that was delayed).

Sincerely,
Aryeh Rubin