

Address to the People of Bosnia *January 11, 1996*

To all the people of Bosnia, let me say I look forward to being with you tomorrow in a land where the waste of war is finally giving way to the promise of peace. As I visit with American peacekeeping forces stationed in Bosnia, I urge you to seize that promise, to turn the peace agreement signed one month ago from words into deeds.

For nearly 4 years, the war that tore Bosnia apart dramatized your differences. But for all that divides you, so much more unites you. Of course you are proud to be Muslims or Croats or Serbs. But all of you are also citizens of Bosnia, bound together by marriage and culture, by language and work, by shared love in a place you all call home. I believe that deep down you all want the same things: To live and raise your families without fear, to make a better life for your children. If these desires are ever to become reality, there must be peace.

The United States and countries all around the world have sent you the men and women of our Armed Forces to help safeguard the peace so many of you have wanted for so long. Our troops are well prepared and heavily armed, but they come in peace. Their mission is to supervise the withdrawal of your armies behind the agreed separation line, to help assure that war does not break out again, to create a more secure climate throughout Bosnia so that you can rebuild your towns and roads, your factories and shops, your parks and playgrounds.

We can help you do all these things, but we cannot guarantee that the people of Bosnia will come together and stay together as citizens, equal citizens, of a common land with a shared destiny. Only you can do that, with the courage of an open mind and the generosity of an open heart.

After so many lives lost and futures destroyed, I know that rebuilding a sense of community and trust may be the very hardest task you face. But you have a responsibility to try—not because other nations want you to do it, not even because your leaders want you to do it—you must do that for yourselves and especially for your children. It is said that every child is the chance for a new beginning. Now this peace gives to all the children of Bosnia and to all

of their families the chance for a new beginning. Seize this chance for peace.

We don't have to imagine what the future will look like if you don't; we have seen that in the sorrow and suffering you have endured already over the past 4 years. But just imagine the future if you do seize this moment, if you do rebuild your land and your lives together. For so much of your history you found strength in your diversity. Muslims, Croats, and Serbs flourished side by side in Sarajevo, in Tuzla, in Mostar, and throughout Bosnia. Some of you prayed in churches, some in mosques, some in synagogues. But you lived and worked together, building schools and libraries, trading goods and services, creating plays and music. You were neighbors and friends and families, and you can be again if you seize the best chance for peace you have had, and what could be the last chance for peace you will have for a long, long time.

I speak to you today on behalf of the American people, who know from our own experience the hard work it takes to forge a community from a nation of so many different groups. More than a century ago, we fought a fierce Civil War over race and slavery. Still today we struggle with the legacy of that war and the challenge of our present makeup when we have so many races and religions and ethnic groups all over America. But we have learned that there are great benefits which come from finding common ground. Our Nation is stronger and the lives of our people are more peaceful, more prosperous, more filled with hope when we bridge the valley of our differences to become a real community. Together with nations from all corners of the world, we have come here to Bosnia to help you do the same.

So, people of Bosnia, you have ended your war, but now you must build your peace. I believe the greatest struggle you face is not among Muslims and Serbs and Croats; it is between those who embrace peace and those who reject it, those who look to the future and those who are blinded by the past, those who open their arms and those who still clench their fists. So each and every one of you must choose. You have seen the horror of war; you know the promise of peace. Choose peace.