

**Speech by the Executive Director of the “Education Builds Bosnia and Herzegovina” Foundation, Mr. Jovan Divjak, ICIP Peace in Progress Award 2013
March 17, 2014**

Distinguished ladies; distinguished gentlemen,
Esteemed guests,
Excellencies,
Dear friends,

I feel honored and proud that the Board of the International Catalan Institute for Peace has bestowed upon me the ICIP Peace in Progress Award 2013. I consider it a tribute to all the people of Sarajevo and of Bosnia and Herzegovina, to young and old, who put all their intellectual and physical efforts into preserving the right to life, freedom and peace during the savage aggression that took place during the years 1992-1995.

We are witnesses to the fact that, every day, everywhere on Earth, there are conflicts between people, and we are also witnesses to wars and peace. Those who develop, plan and lead these wars are the main defenders, lobbyists for peace. What hypocrisy! When, right now, thousands of women, children and elderly people are dying at their doorsteps, victims of weapons that have been prohibited by the conventions of world organizations.

Major countries, corporations and arms producers don't like the idea of eternal peace because, if those who defend peace and respect the right to life won and could change the world, armies wouldn't be needed; they would be useless and their financial backers would lose all their power.

We live in a world full of absurdities in which the masters of our lives invoke democracy and the UN Declaration of Human Rights while, at the same time, hundreds of thousands of people on this Earth are dying of hunger, disease and poverty. In the magnificent buildings of New York, Geneva and Brussels, well-paid public officials discuss and write up infinite resolutions calling upon world leaders to make life on this planet more humane. But today the exact opposite is happening: many people die and suffer, as a result of arms, hunger and disease.

World religions appeal for peace, tolerance and love in daily sermons, but these appeals do not reach the thoughts and souls of warlords. We are witnesses to daily conflicts between warmongers and peacemakers. In this unequal struggle, innocents are killed. And those who have not actively participated and who have remained neutral, thinking that this would save them, are also killed. That is just an illusion that harms everyone.

The warmongers, those who have tons of weapons of murder and destruction, favor their use. This is a situation where one man pushing a button decides over the lives of millions of

peacemakers. Therefore, all the actions of those who fight for peace for all, even for those who want to kill, are worthy of respect and are worth the effort. These peacemakers, including myself, are perhaps physically weak, but spiritually strong.

I personally witnessed a period of great suffering in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the 1990s, but I've also witnessed these turbulent postwar years.

Each one of us has the right to freely choose good or evil; to be a peacemaker or a warmonger. But, as a poet said, only those who dedicate their lives to fighting for good are worthy of respect.

I was born and raised in a family that taught me love, respect for others who are different, and peace as the only alternative for living. That strengthened my conviction that if you do good, you will receive good in return. Obviously, it is not easy and it requires great sacrifices. Peace and love are not offered to us on a silver platter. On the road of life we often find ourselves between Scylla and Charybdis, but we should never forget that peace, as our most important value, should always guide us all.

Twenty years have gone by since the war and since 1994, when we created the "Education Builds Bosnia and Herzegovina" Foundation, with the mission to "provide continuous care to the child victims of our war" and help children who have lost one or both parents, children who are disabled or exceptionally gifted, Romany children and children with social needs. We educate

them, teach them the difference between good and bad, and lay a foundation of peace and tolerance, against war and hatred.

I am very proud of the fact that our noble humanitarian mission has been recognized by the District 11 City to City Foundation, and the group of humanists led by Mr. Manel Vila. He is one of the many people who participated in the defense of the multi-national and multi-faith nature of the city of Sarajevo. I am very grateful to the Generalitat of Catalonia and the Barcelona City Council because, in an altruistic manner, they morally and materially helped the citizens of Sarajevo both during the war and afterwards, with postwar reconstruction. Mr. Manel Vila was one of the main activists. He often says that, after Barcelona, his favorite city is Sarajevo. He is now actively participating in the project of a decade for Sarajevo, the “Museum of the Siege of Sarajevo.”

Thank you, citizens of Barcelona and of Catalonia, for all you did for the welfare of the citizens of the capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

From the Parliament of Catalonia I appeal to world leaders, when faced with the daily choice between pushing the red button that activates a system of terrible warfare and holding up olive branches, to opt for the latter. To use their unlimited power to fight hunger and disease, and to defend human rights, regardless of skin color, religion or sex.

Before the Earth and the laws of God we affirm that we must build a life of happiness, without anxiety, for children and young people, in peace and with our love.

Dear friends, ICIP, Parliament of Catalonia, District 11 City to City Foundation, I assure you that I will not let you down and that, together with young people, we will fight for everlasting peace as the only purpose of human life.

Thank you from the bottom of my heart.

Jovan Divjak, Executive Director
“Education Builds Bosnia and Herzegovina” Foundation
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