

Mr. President, Your Honours, Madam Prosecutor, I would like to thank you for giving me this opportunity to address you.

Two years ago, immediately after the indictment was made public, I surrendered to the organs of the Tribunal in order to face the allegations and for the truth to come out. At that time, in my state, there was no legal framework for the cooperation with the Tribunal. None of the officers against whom indictments had been issued had surrendered, and the public opinion was against such an act. Together with my Defence team and with the minimal assistance provided by the organs of the state and of the military, I thoroughly investigated and examined the allegations in the indictment and my individual and objective responsibility. I was aware of my command responsibility for the acts of my subordinates in combat and for the failings and mistakes in the exercise of command over troops.

At the same time, I felt the need for us as a responsible society to openly and sincerely face the war crimes that have been committed. I believed that it was important to start cooperating with the Tribunal and that despite all the opposition and lack of understanding in the public somebody should definitely start the process of accepting the responsibility of asking forgiveness of the victims and, as the final goal, of achieving reconciliation with the environment.

Your Honour, there are two reasons why I'm here today: The first is my personal conviction that as a commander I have a moral and personal obligation to accept responsibility and to ask forgiveness for the acts of my subordinates, even though I did not order them; the second reason is the awareness of the fact that my admission of guilt and repentance and remorse are more important than my personal fate.

On the 6th of December, 1991, two people were killed, three people were wounded and substantial damage was caused to civilian structures and to cultural and historical monuments in the old town of Dubrovnik.

The fact that these lives were lost in the area for which I was responsible will remain etched in my consciousness for the rest of my life. I am ready to bow before all the victims of this conflict, regardless of the side they were on, with the dignity of a soldier.

Furthermore, although I had already done that in the course of the shelling itself over the radio, and afterwards I did it again in person, I feel the obligation to express my deepest sympathy to the families of those who were killed and wounded and the citizens of Dubrovnik for the pain and all the damage that was caused to them by the unit under my command. I see my regret as a prerequisite for reconciliation and the coexistence of various peoples in this area.

Your Honour, I have been a professional soldier my whole life. As such, I have abided by the officers code trying to serve my profession and my country honourably. That is why I stand here before you, in hope that my act will contribute to the final reconciliation and that it will enable the people in this area to live together and that it will also create a possibility for my people not to bear the burden of guilt now and in the future.