

I'm thankful to have this opportunity to speak today. Nearly two years ago, I came before this Tribunal, having been charged with participating in crimes against other human beings, and even against humanity itself. I came for two reasons: To confront these charges and to spare my people, for it was clear that they would pay the price of any refusal to come. I have now had time to examine these charges and, together with my lawyers, conduct our own investigation and evaluation. I have now come to the belief and accept the fact that many thousands of innocent people were the victims of an organised, systematic effort to remove Muslims and Croats from the territory claimed by Serbs.

At the time, I easily convinced myself that this was a matter of survival and self-defence. In fact, it was more. Our leadership, of which I was a necessary part, led an effort which victimised countless innocent people. Explanations of self-defence and survival offer no justification. By the end, it was said, even among our own people, that in this war we had lost our nobility of character. The obvious questions become, if this truth is now self-evident, why did I not see it earlier? And how could our leaders and those who followed have committed such acts? The answer to both questions is, I believe, fear, a blinding fear that led to an obsession, especially for those of us for whom the Second World War was a living memory, that Serbs would never again allow themselves to become victims. In this, we in the leadership violated the most basic duty of every human being, the duty to restrain oneself and to respect the human dignity of others. We were committed to do whatever was necessary to prevail.

Although I was repeatedly informed of allegations of cruel and inhuman conduct against non-Serbs, I refused to accept them or even to investigate. In fact, I immersed myself in addressing the suffering of the war's innocent Serb victims. This daily work confirmed in my mind that we were in a struggle for our very survival and that in this struggle, the international community was our enemy, and so I simply denied these charges, making no effort to investigate. I remained secure in my belief that Serbs were not capable of such acts. In this obsession of ours to never again become victims, we had allowed ourselves to become victimisers.

You have heard, both yesterday and today, the litany of suffering that this produced. I have accepted responsibility for my part in this. This responsibility is mine and mine alone. It does not extend to other leaders who have a right to defend themselves. It certainly should not extend to our Serbian people, who have already paid a terrible price for our leadership. The knowledge that I am responsible for such human suffering and for soiling the character of my people will always be with me.

There is a justice which demands a life for each innocent life, a death for each wrongful death. It is, of course, not possible for me to meet the demands of such justice. I can only do what is in my power and hope that it will be of some benefit, that having come to the truth, to speak it, and to accept responsibility. This will, I hope, help the Muslim, Croat, and even Serb innocent victims not to be

overtaken with bitterness, which often becomes hatred and is in the end self-destructive.

As for my own people, I have referred today to their character. I think it, therefore, important to explain what I'm speaking of. There now stands in the centre of Belgrade a great domed church, still under construction, the construction begun in 1935. Our people have persevered in building this church as a monument to a man who more than any other formed the character of the Serbian people. That man was the great St. Sava. The path he followed was marked by self-restraint and respect for all others. A great diplomat who gained the respect of his people and the world around him, a man whose character has become deeply ingrained in the Serbian people.

It is the path and example of St. Sava that the great Serbian leaders have followed, even in our own times, demonstrating a noble endurance and dignity, even in the most difficult circumstances. One need only point to Bishop Artemije Radosavljević, who to this very day is a voice crying out for justice in what has become for Serbs the wilderness of Kosovo. Tragically, our leaders, including myself, abandoned this path in the last war. I think it is clear that I have separated myself from those leaders, but too late. Yet, this leadership, without shame, continues to seek the loyalty and support of our people. It is done by provoking fear and speaking half-truths in order to convince our people that the world is against us. But by now the fruits of this leadership are clear. They are graves, refugees, isolation, and bitterness against the whole world, which spurns us because of these very leaders.

I have been urged that this is not the time nor the place to speak this truth. We must wait, they say, until others also accept responsibility for their deeds. But I believe that there is no place and that there is no time where it is not appropriate to speak the truth. I believe that we must put our own house in order. Others will have to examine themselves and their own conduct. We must live in the world and not in a cave. The world is always imperfect and often unjust, but as long as we persevere and preserve our identity and our character, we have nothing to fear.

As for me, it is the members of this Trial Chamber that have been given the responsibility to judge. You must strive in your judgment to find whatever justice this world can offer, not only for me but also for the innocent victims of this war. I will, however, make one appeal, and that is to the Tribunal itself, the Judges, Prosecutors, investigators; **that you do all within your power to bring justice to all sides**. In doing this, you may be able to accomplish the mission for which this Tribunal has been created.