

Press Release

27 years after Srebrenica: An Apology from the Dutch State

During the yearly memorial of the genocide in Srebrenica the Minister of Defense, Kasja Ollengren offered her “deepest apologies” on behalf of the government to the next of kin and survivors of the mass murder in Srebrenica. According to her, the international community failed in protecting the enclave Srebrenica. The Netherlands as part of that international community was politically co-responsible “for the situation in which this could happen” as stated by Ollengren. The minister repeated the earlier position of The Netherlands that the international community and The Netherlands failed to protect 8000 Muslim men in the middle of Europe against the genocide. In 2002, former Prime-Minister Wim Kok stated as a result of the NIOD-report on the role of Dutchbat in Srebrenica, that The Netherlands were co-responsible but had no fault in the matter. Since then, the interpretation of this “co-responsibility” remained unchanged. That is, a co-responsibility without consequences, like taking responsibility for their own faults and compensating the next of kin who lost their family members during the genocide.

What did change throughout the years is the reduction of the liability of the Dutch state for the genocide and the position towards the Dutch UN Dutchbat battalion under whose protection Muslim men were handed over to Serbian militias. In 2014 the court in The Hague ruled that The Netherlands were not responsible for the death of over 8000 Muslim men, but only co-responsible for the deportation of over 300 men. In other words, Dutchbat was not responsible for the fate of 7700 Muslim men who were carried off and executed. In 2017 the same court ruled that the previous verdict, that is, that the state is merely responsible for the deaths of 300 Muslim men remains but that the damages suffered will only be reimbursed for 30 percent. This means that the Dutch state is only responsible for 30 percent of ‘only’ 300 victims who were inside the Dutch military base. The Dutchbat soldiers also remained in the clear. The High Council ruled two years later that the state is not liable for 30 percent but 10 percent in respects to the reimbursement of the next of kin. The liability and fault of the Dutch state was yet again reduced. From responsibility of the deaths of over 8000 men and full reimbursement of the next of kin to responsibility of 300 men with only 10% compensation for the next of kin. Who knows if the liability of the Dutch state will be reduced even more in the future.

Prime Minister Mark Rutte has also apologized on behalf of the government to the Dutchbat veterans. He stated that the Dutch state was responsible for the circumstances in which the veterans were deployed and received compensation of 5000 euros as a “lack of recognition and appreciation”. While the next of kin of the genocide after 27 years have not received any compensation. Most of the next of kin are elderly of which some have already passed away.

What the next of kin did receive after 27 years was an apology from The Netherlands. If we measure this apology to how the Dutch state dealt with its sense of responsibility in respects to the genocide, we can conclude that this apology is nothing more than a sham and a slap in the face of the next of kin. This is yet another case in which Western state show their true nature and instead of taking responsibility, they trivialize their part in the bloodshed. The capitalist states do not value human life, especially if it concerns Muslims.

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