

# War crimes tribunal will bring justice to those denied peace

## WARREN CHRISTOPHER

**A**trocities continue in the former Yugoslavia, as recent reports of the murder of civilians in central Bosnia remind us.

The United Nations has established the first international war crimes tribunal since those convened in Nuremberg and Tokyo at the conclusion of World War II. The new tribunal will conduct criminal trials to prosecute those responsible for the torture, rape, indiscriminate killing and other war crimes that have marked the conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The United States unequivocally endorses the mission of this important body.

In establishing the tribunal, the Security Council has reaffirmed a fundamental principle that binds civilized societies: Those who carry out atrocities must be held accountable for their actions. So must those who have failed their legal duty to prevent and punish

war crimes. No one should be exempt from the tribunal's mandate. Prosecutors will be free to follow the evidence, wherever it leads, and the tribunal will have the authority to require any state to deliver an accused war criminal for trial.

There has been speculation that the tribunal's ability to deal with high-ranking officials accused of war crimes might be circumscribed. The United States will insist that the tribunal retain the authority necessary to bring war criminals to justice, whoever they may be and wherever they may be found.

We will consider diplomatic and economic sanctions against states that refuse to cooperate with the tribunal and will encourage other nations to do the same.

Maintaining the full authority of the tribunal is important for two reasons:

First, it is the only way to ensure that the international community can deal with all alleged criminal acts. Leaving brutal crimes unpunished will only perpetuate the cycle of vio-

lence and vengeance.

Second, the tribunal's efforts will extend far beyond its immediate goal and far beyond the Balkans. The work of the tribunal will help to deter those who would settle ethnic and territorial disputes through ethnic cleansing and attacks on civilians. The tribunal's existence signals that the world rejects the argument that atrocities can be justified as a reaction to the violence of prior generations, or for any other reason.

It signals that the world upholds the principle that civilians, soldiers and prisoners must be treated in a humane and lawful manner - in this and in future conflicts. And it will demonstrate that civilized societies can deal swiftly, directly and fairly with violations of international humanitarian law.

Our support for the war crimes tribunal goes well beyond endorsement of its charter. Since the tribunal's creation, this administration has contributed more than a half-million dollars to assist the investigation of atrocities.

We have provided information on abuses and intend to encourage the exchange of information between UN member states and the tribunal to speed the process of ferreting out war criminals and bringing them to justice.

We will contribute additional resources, both financial and human, to the same end. Already a distinguished former federal judge, Gabrielle Kirk McDonald of Texas, has been elected to serve on the tribunal. We expect to recommend other highly qualified professionals to assist the chief prosecutor, Ramon Escobar-Salom.

The creation of an effective mechanism for addressing atrocities in the former Yugoslavia cannot wipe away the fact of those atrocities. But there is no reason a people who have been denied peace for so long must also be denied justice. Without justice, the healing process cannot begin.

*Warren Christopher is the US secretary of state.*