

INTERVIEWS

Mirasada Njemsevic, M.D.
University Hospital, Sarajevo

‘I think the world is forgetting Bosnia’

Dr. Mirasada Njemsevic was a surgeon on the staff of the University Hospital in Sarajevo for eighteen years, working especially with children. Gabriella Chaitkin interviewed her on March 28, 1996 in Los Angeles, with the assistance of Nihad Dzinovic of the National Advisory Board for Humanitarian Aid of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Fidelio: Helga Zepp LaRouche, in her Call To Save the Children of Bosnia-Herzegovina, says that between 1992 and 1995, 10.7 percent of all children and young people up to the age of 19 were killed or are missing, that every tenth child lost it's life, every fifth child was wounded, and every sixth child was made an invalid. What's more, there are thousands of children who have suffered severe psycho-physical injuries.

You were a surgeon specializing in children's injuries during the war. Can you give us an idea of what happened? Because when we hear the statistics, they are just numbers.

Dr. Njemsevic: From the first day of my practice, beginning 1972, up to a year and a half ago, I always worked in pediatrics, with children. I like to work with children, but it was hard for me during the war, to see children killed, children with massive bleeding, with multiple traumas, with difficulty breathing, comatose children, crying children, children suffering for their leg, or for their hand. Many children were without a hand or a leg, or with both legs paralyzed, deplegia, and some hemiplegia. Or a young girl without both legs; young men without both legs. It was very difficult for me to see this.

And to work in this situation—oper-

*Mirasada Njemsevic (right)
and Nihad Dzinovic.*

ating without light, with candles, or without needles to sew up wounds, or different needles, without which you cannot do certain things. Sometimes we had things, sometimes we didn't; sometimes the x-rays were working, sometimes not.

Mr. Dzinovic: There came a time that women were more important as surgeons than men, at least in one respect. Because these kids, where they were injured, maybe they can't use their hands any more to feed themselves. So she fed them. She replaced the mother, she would talk to them, because the mother was far away—

Dr. Njemsevic: Or the mother was dead. Many mothers were killed.

Mr. Dzinovic: And then, she was there to talk to them, not just to be a surgeon, but at the same time, to be like a mother in the hospital.

Dr. Njemsevic: I have many, many stories. There was shelling all the time. In a suburb near the Sarajevo airport, about twelve o'clock, midday, it was a very nice sunny day, and the children went outside to play a little bit, because they spent all their time in basements. It was spring, and the children wanted to play outside. And just at that moment, they started to shell. Just one grenade hit, and it wounded twenty



EIRNS

It's a harder situation than during the war, because then, some humanitarian help was donated, but now—nothing! There is no money for food, there is no clothing. Children grow very quickly, and there are no clothes, no shoes, and it is cold.

children, and killed four.

A girl, twelve years old, died in my arms. It was a very dramatic situation. Her hand was completely torn, there was a very big wound at her breast, her thorax was ripped open, and her leg was wounded, the muscles of her leg were completely gone. She stayed alive just two hours, her stomach was wounded also, and she had internal bleeding. All the operating rooms were filled that day, because there were just five operating rooms working.

Fidelio: This happened every day?

Dr. Njemsevic: Everyday, someone was killed. Sometimes once during the day,



EIRNS/Dean Andromidas

Two children who lost a leg during the siege of Bihac.

sometimes three times, or ten times. It usually happened at night, when the troops came.

I treated everybody, although mostly children. All wounded children were brought to my hospital. But overnight, it was my duty to attend to everyone. In the war we changed, because many doctors had left the country.

Mr. Dzinovic: Why don't you tell of little Avdar?

Dr. Njemsevic: Ah, yes, this was a small baby, a two-month-old boy. It was in the beginning of the war. His mother was taking him to a neighbor's basement, because the shelling had started. But a grenade came down, and cut little Avdar's leg, and killed the mother. And this boy was in my clinic for about six months.

But what happened was that Avdar was taken to Italy. A journalist took him to Italy, and two years later this journalist returned, and he brought me pictures of Avdar—and Avdar walked!

Fidelio: So, some times there is a happy ending?

Dr. Njemsevic: Yes. Avdar walked, he had a prosthesis; and for going to the beach, he had special gears, for children. This journalist took on a girl from Bosnia also, because she spoke the Bos-

It was a very nice sunny day, and the children went outside to play a little bit, because they spent all their time in basements. It was spring. Just at that moment, a grenade hit, and it wounded twenty children, and killed four.

ian language, and he wanted Avdar to know it. This was very moving.

Fidelio: Most people think of Bosnia, not as a rich nation, but still, as a nation in Europe. Even the World Bank called it a “middle

income prosperous nation”—not that the World Bank counts for much, of course. Could you describe the conditions before the war, during the war, and what is going on now?

Dr. Njemsevic: Well, before the war, the normal situation in the hospital was not rich, like in America, but it worked. It was poor, yes, but it worked. We had a new orthopedics clinic, with ten operating rooms, and traumas with about five, and general surgery overall had six.

But during the war, can you imagine, we did not even have sheets? Not even blankets. Can you imagine? And no pillows, no mattresses. Everyone slept in the same place, with the blood smelling. There was no water for washing. Can you imagine, people washed the hospital blankets by hand! And hung them outside to dry. This is why everything smelled.

Fidelio: This is hygienically completely insane, right?

Dr. Njemsevic: Yes, no sterilization!

Fidelio: Could you sterilize your operating instruments?

Dr. Njemsevic: Oh, yes, we sterilized instruments. We had one old autoclav, and we sterilized. But we had infections all the time. We were lucky, however, because we had really good nurses, and

really good surgeons. Everyone did everything, including washing bandages when we needed to. And the nurses and surgeons did everything, and the infections we had were not as bad as you would expect under the circumstances. We were all waiting for worse.

Would you like me to tell you about the shelling of our hospital?

Fidelio: Please.

Dr. Njemsevic: It was shelled many times. We put the children in the hall, because it was closed off, with no windows. And we put some children in the basement, under the building. One day, we started to go downstairs, and the first grenade hit the front door on our side. If we had started two minutes earlier, we would all have been killed. But I had said to the nurse, please let's go down the other side. And at this moment, the grenade hit, and we stayed in the hall. On this day, in two hours, there were one hundred grenades.

Fidelio: Was yours the main hospital in Sarajevo?

Dr. Njemsevic: Yes, the main one.

Fidelio: Are there others?

Dr. Njemsevic: We have the military hospital, which is now destroyed completely. It was a large hospital. The old part was twelve stories high, where there were offices, transfusions, to prepare blood, some laboratories, women's examinations. The other part was a new hospital, fourteen stories. It was completely destroyed, only the basement is left.

Fidelio: You get the impression the hospitals were deliberately shelled.

Dr. Njemsevic: Oh, yes, they did that all the time, intentionally. The pediatric hospital and the women's hospital were

completely destroyed, the entire building.

And a new hospital, Jeserev, was completely destroyed. The hospital for tuberculosis patients, destroyed. And the Kosovo Hospital was destroyed.

Fidelio: So, there is no hospital left, except the University hospital? And that is very much reduced?

Dr. Njemsevic: At the military hospital, they still can work, just in the basement and part of the first floor. At Kosovo Hospital, the trauma center is largely destroyed, only one part is working, and one part of the orthopedic clinic is working.

Fidelio: How do you see Bosnia today, after four years of war?

Dr. Njemsevic: The situation is not very good. Everything is at a standstill. No one can rebuild, no one can put glass into the windows—it is cold, but no one

has glass. Children cannot go to school, even in basements, because the schools are destroyed—there are no chairs, no paper, no books, nothing. No rooms, no electricity, no heating.

Fidelio: How about food?

Dr. Njemsevic: Food? It's a harder situation than during the war, because then, some humanitarian help was donated, but now—nothing! There is no shelling, no killing now, but there is no money for food. And there is no clothing. Children grow very quickly, and there are no clothes, no shoes. And it is cold.

I think the world is forgetting Bosnia now.

Fidelio: Now that the war is over, people are forgetting?

Dr. Njemsevic: Yes, I think so. You can not imagine how much the country was destroyed. Every school, every hospital,

every house destroyed. And all transport destroyed.

It is genocide—the worst, I think, in the last part of the Twentieth century in Europe, especially considering the high level of civilization of the continent.

And what is the hardest for me, is what this country owes, the 4.7 billion. Bosnia is completely destroyed, but the World Bank wants it to pay the debt of former Yugoslavia. I hope the World Bank will wipe out that debt.

Fidelio: Let me tell you what the World Bank said about that. During a press conference, held by the World Bank in Washington, D.C., the Acting Country Director for Bosnia, Christine Wallich, said, "The World Bank simply cannot do that."

Dr. Njemsevic: I cannot believe this. Bosnia was the poorest republic of

What does the World Bank want to take? Does it want to take the breath from the people, to pay back the loan? It's impossible! Bosnia needs rebuilding—it needs food, it needs clothing, it needs industry to start up again!

Yes, Bosnia needs what you call a Marshall Plan, what was used for Germany after the war. Let's do it! It would be a new page of history.



Nihad Dzinovic

Above: Mr. Dzinovic stands in the remains of Sarajevo Military Hospital, destroyed by shelling. Left: Sarajevo's 1984 Olympic Stadium, now an emergency cemetery.

Yugoslavia, and it is now destroyed. What does the World Bank want to take? Does it want to take the breath from the people, to pay back the loan? How can the people pay back anything? It's impossible! Bosnia needs rebuilding—it needs food, it needs clothing, it needs industry to start up again. Only twenty percent are working, just light work, and without pay.

Fidelio: In her Call, Mrs. LaRouche proposed a new Marshall Plan for Bosnia.

Dr. Njemsevic: Yes, exactly.

Mr. Dzinovic: They *do* need what you call a Marshall Plan, what was used for Germany after the war. We should do the same thing, and call it the Bosnia Plan. It should be the same thing: we should use a million soldiers to do the rebuilding. This country spends billions and billions every year. Let's do it, and create a new beginning. Let's build it. The entire infrastructure in Bosnia is wrecked, and should be put in order. It would be a new page of history: To look at soldiers, not as thinking of destroying people, but instead, to be the ones used for reconstruction.

Dr. Njemsevic: Yes, the military should help in rebuilding. They should start from the beginning, from zero—because, actually, the level is under zero right now. This could be done very quickly. Starting with rebuilding the roads, because all the roads were destroyed. And if you don't have roads, you cannot do anything.

Mr. Dzinovic: That's how you build up an economy.

Fidelio: And if this does not happen?

Mr. Dzinovic: If it does not happen, then the country will go back five hundred years. We will go back to the Dark Ages, right in the center of Europe. It would be an absolute shame for the whole world, for all Europe, to let that happen.

Think of it like a Rwanda in Europe. In Rwanda, in three months, they killed a million people. So you have a state, but no people. It seems to be the same ideology being done to our people, the same idea. But, thank God, they did not completely succeed in wiping out everyone.

Monsignor Franjo Komarica Bishop of Banja Luka, Bosnia

'We are people, entitled to fundamental human rights!'

Banja Luka was the stronghold of the Greater Serbians in Bosnia. Taken over by their gangs in 1991, it was to be the example for "ethnic cleansing," in which all non-Serbs were to be terrorized into leaving. Churches, convents, mosques, and cemeteries were destroyed, sometimes bombed and uprooted from their foundations. Out of 110,000 Catholics in the dioceses, 80,000 were forced to leave. For the Muslim population, it was even worse.

Monsignor Komarica was interviewed on March 15 by Umberto Pascali, and the interview was translated from Croatian by Margaret Casman-Vuko. The following is abridged.

Fidelio: Monsignor Komarica, your name has become famous throughout the world because you and your Croatian Catholic clergy have steadfastly remained in the Banja Luka region of Bosnia, usurped by the Republika Srpska, despite an official policy to eliminate all non-Serbs and create a homogeneous Serbian entity. Could you describe the period when you were in Banja Luka, from the beginning of the conflict, and your main experiences there?

Bishop Komarica: Dear friends, I thank you most sincerely for your humanity, and the love you express to those of us in danger, many thousands of miles away. All of us are people, God's creation, God's children, part of a great family. I rejoice. Although you are far away, on another continent, you are very close to us. Much more binds us to our fellow man than divides us. This fundamental truth, corroborated by your interest in us, has been my life's creed during the past years. I have always tried to conduct myself accordingly among people, especially among my neighbors of whatever religious or ethnic national affiliation. We

I regularly asked, 'Why are you doing this to us?' They would say, 'You aren't guilty of anything. However, you have to leave here.' I could not accept this.

have far more similarities, kinships, and mutual bonds, than whatever divides us.

I cannot accept that the most precious human values, mutual respect and love, are no longer valid. This makes no sense. These precious values, common to every person, should not be displaced by enmity, hatred, war, destruction, egoism, and exclusivity.

In response to your question, I am a witness to a volcano, to an avalanche of exclusivity. I cannot explain, even to myself, where such evil in people's hearts comes from. It seemed to rise to the surface overnight, in people's words, in crimes. I can only explain this according to the Gospels, in the words of Jesus Christ: ". . . for from the fullness of the heart, the mouth speaks" (Lk 6:45).

As you know, during the past decades, this land, my homeland, as well as much of Europe, has been engulfed by a wave of atheism. This means that religion has been practically absent. The individual has lost connection with the transcendental world, with God.

Thus, what happens, happens. Truth is no longer truth. Honor is no longer honor. A brother is no longer a brother. Confusion prevails. The scale of values is totally distorted. A person feels very lost. He enters a dark tunnel of hopelessness, destruction, and horrible fear. I have also noticed many examples, many, many examples, of people, especially