

Your Excellencies, laureates and families, dear students and teachers, ladies and gentlemen, dear friends,

It is my great honor and pleasure to be here today at the presentation of the Duško Kondor Award for Civil Courage - and the Dusko Kondor Award for Affirmation of Civil Courage.

This Award was established in honor of Duško Kondor, teacher, human rights activist as well as co-founder of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Republika Srpska, who was viciously killed at his own home in Bijeljina in February five years ago.

I know that here with us today, we have some of his friends and former students - who are proud to have known the Professor - and who will always remember the things he taught them. I would especially like to greet you.

I also have the honor today to present the Award for Civil Courage to the citizens of Sarajevo for their bravery and courage during the siege of the City from 6 April 1992 to 29 February 1996.

The siege of Sarajevo, as it came to be popularly known, was an occurrence of such notoriety in the conflict in the former Yugoslavia - that one must go back to World War II to find a parallel in European history. And it happened here in Sarajevo, the beautiful city which hosted the Olympic Winter Games in 1984; the Games that the whole world was watching and enjoying.

Today, here, we pay respect to all those who were killed, died or got wounded during the 1,425 days of the besieged city in the heart of Europe.

More than 10,000 people lost their lives, more than 50,000 persons were wounded.

We are also here to celebrate the lives of those who survived.

We honor the people of Sarajevo for having upheld their dignity and the dignity of their city - in spite of four years with living conditions well below human standards.

We honor the Sarajevans for defying the cold, the hunger, the mortar fire and the snipers – in order to get daily necessities.

We honor the inhabitants of Sarajevo for having preserved the spirit of Sarajevo in spite of facing death or bereavement every day.

Their endurance proved the strength of human nature.

Under tremendous stress they preserved their creativity, their sense of humor and their pride.

Today, we present the award to all 340,000 persons who stayed in Sarajevo during that period.

This winter we had heavy snowfalls in Sarajevo. When I opened my door one Saturday morning, I saw my garden and the street in front of my house covered in more than a meter of snow.

Very soon, however, neighbors started pouring into the street from their houses with shovels, winter gear and equipment, and started cleaning the street all the way down to the tarmac – so you could drive a car there.

Other neighbors came out with hot tea, sandwiches, and very soon, the street was full of laughter, people, and playful children.

I used to think that “dugnad”, the Norwegian expression for voluntary work done together with other people, described something that is typical for Norway. But, this February, I saw it was not completely true. “Dugnad” is also something Sarajevan which existed in abundance during the war.

I am glad to be serving as Norwegian ambassador in Sarajevo. And – I am very honored to be able to present this award to all the citizens of Sarajevo - who deserve it more than anyone.

It is my pleasure to introduce Mr. Miroslav Živanović, Deputy Mayor of Sarajevo.