

**Official justification for awarding the 2018 Max van der Stoel Award
to the High School Students from the Municipality of Jajce
in Bosnia and Herzegovina**

The Jury of the Max van der Stoel Award has decided to honour the High School Students from the Municipality of Jajce in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) with the 2018 Max van der Stoel Award in recognition of their outstanding courage and inspirational activism which led to the prevention of further segregation in schools in Jajce, as well as across the country.

Education is one of the most important tools for furthering integration and social cohesion in post-conflict multi-ethnic societies. However, it is also prone to divisive discourses and policies and, over the past quarter of a century, education has remained sensitive and controversial in BiH.

Recognizing that the root causes of conflicts are often deeply embedded in cultural and structural forms of violence, overcoming segregation in schools and improving co-operation between different ethnic communities is a prerequisite to build and sustain just, stable and peaceful democracies.

In the summer of 2016, the students in Jajce upheld these principles when they stood against a cantonal decision to establish a new school solely for Bosniak students. The cantonal decision had been taken along the “two schools under one roof” practice of ethnically segregated schools in the country which deepens the estrangement between the communities.

To pursue their goal and fulfil their aspirations, brave students of all ethnic backgrounds in Jajce gathered around the “Segregation is a bad investment” slogan and other inclusive messages. True to their commitment, they achieved, after a year-long battle, an unprecedented victory against a government decision to further divide them along ethnic lines.

Acknowledging the tenacity and moral authority of these courageous students, as well as recognizing the need to nurture their quest for inclusive and better quality education, through *inter alia*, investing in innovative means of instruction and placing them at the disposal of all students, the Jury made the unanimous decision to reward the students from Jajce, represented by the Student Council of the Secondary Vocational School Jajce, with the 2018 Max van der Stoel Award.