

Public Statement

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Bosnia-Herzegovina: Accountability at the Hague still needed at the highest level

Amnesty International welcomed today's verdict by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia on the former Bosnian-Croat politician Dario Kordic and Mario Cerkez, former commander of the HVO Vitez Brigade. "The verdict represents a step forward in bringing political leaders responsible for violations of international law in the region to justice", added the organization.

Dario Kordic and Mario Cerkez were found guilty of criminal responsibility in the systematic persecution of Bosnian Muslim civilians in the Lasva valley and elsewhere in central Bosnia between November 1991 and November 1994. They were sentenced to 25 years' and 15 years' imprisonment respectively.

*Although Dario Kordic is the highest ranking politician to be brought before the Tribunal to date, the Trial Chamber concluded that though he was a senior member of the Bosnian-Croat *de facto* authorities in central Bosnia, he was not "among the highest echelons of the [Bosnian-Croat] political command. However, as a regional leader in central Bosnia he was found to have been involved in the planning, preparation and ordering of military actions, which in the words of the court rendered him as guilty - if not more so - "than those who fired the guns".*

However, Amnesty International remains concerned that many suspects indicted by the Tribunal - including political leaders - remain at large.

“The arrest of indicted political leaders and others suspected of war crimes is an essential step for the restoration of human rights in the region,” said a spokesperson of Amnesty International. “We urge UN member states – including the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia – to arrest those who have been indicted by the Tribunal, and transfer them to its custody”, the organization added.

Charges against the two men included persecution of Bosnian Muslims through systematic attacks on cities, towns and villages throughout central Bosnia including Vitez, Busovaca, Kiseljak and Ahmici – and the wilful killing, murder or ill-treatment of their Bosniac inhabitants. Both men were charged on 22 separate counts of crimes against humanity, violations of the law and customs of war and grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions. Kordic was acquitted on six counts, where either evidence was lacking, or where the chamber decided he did not have the authority to act. Mario Cerkez – identified as both a military commander and participant by the Chamber – was found guilty on 15 counts; on seven others – including command responsibility for the attack on the village of Ahmici – he was acquitted.

Background

Between November 1991 and August 1993, Dario Kordic was Vice President of the, the *de facto* Croatian community in Bosnia-Herzegovina (HZ H-B); in 1993 he assumed the role of Vice-President of the self-declared Croatian Republic of Herceg-Bosna (HR H-B). He also represented himself and was regarded by others as a senior Croatian Defence Council (HVO) official.

On 3 March last year, the international character of the conflict between the Bosnian Croat and Bosnian Muslim communities was

determined in the trial of General Tihomir Blaskic, the highest-ranking military officer brought before the Tribunal so far - who was sentenced to 45 year's imprisonment.

Five Bosnian Croats were found guilty in January 2000 of the massacre at Ahmici and sentenced by the Tribunal to between six and 25 years' imprisonment

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