

# £BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

## @Abuses in Bosnian Serb areas: Update

This document gives further information relevant to the subject of the report *"You have no place here": Abuses in Bosnian Serb-controlled areas* (AI Index: EUR 63/11/94 [abridged version EUR 63/12/94], June 1994).

### *Further abuses reported*

Amnesty International has continued to learn of new abuses against members of minorities in Serb-controlled areas of Bosnia-Herzegovina. According to a *Reuters* report of 5 July 1994, Serbs in uniform beat at least 40 Muslims and Croats who on the night of 4 July were queueing outside an office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Banja Luka to register to leave the area. A spokesman in Sarajevo for the UNHCR reportedly said, "A police car pulled up and four men in uniform and a civilian got out and began...beating them with police truncheons, regardless of age or sex." The assailants reportedly left after an initial round of beatings, but returned 30 minutes later and attacked the crowd again. According to the spokesman: "These police then hid in the bushes on the opposite side of the road until 6am [the next morning], beating anyone who tried to return to the office...Many of the people who visited our office this morning [5 July] had been beaten black and blue and some still had blood on their faces. We believe three people were hospitalized and between 40 and 45 people were beaten altogether." A Bosnian Serb liaison officer later reportedly said he was unaware of what had happened and promised to investigate.

Other abuses, such as forcing men to perform work close to front lines, also reportedly continue. On 6 July *The Guardian* (London), citing the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), reported that in the past two months hundreds of Muslims and Croats had been drafted for front-line work in the Ozren region of north-central Bosnia-Herzegovina, the scene of fighting between Bosnian Serb and Bosnian Government forces. There they were forced to dig trenches and deliver ammunition to Serb positions, exposing them to sniper fire from Bosnian Government troops. According to *The Guardian*, the ICRC regarded the mobilization of minorities for front line work as the latest in a line of repressive measures to force Muslims and Croats to abandon their homes. An unnamed ICRC official was quoted as saying: "It is against the Geneva Convention and humanitarian law, but both sides are doing it - the Muslims to a lesser extent."

### *Actions by the authorities*

According to the Belgrade newspaper *Borba*, of 4 June 1994, police in the Banja Luka region arrested 105 people in April and May for banditry, rape, extortion and murder. Eleven out of a total of 16 murders reported to the police were said to have been solved. The perpetrators in two incidents of rape were said to have been identified and 25 of 40 reported incidents of banditry were said to have been solved. A group of five displaced persons (presumably Serbs) from the Bosnian Government-controlled town of Zenica were reported to have been arrested for the rape and murder of Suada Omerovi\_, a Roma woman from Banja Luka, on 13 March 1994.

Amnesty International welcomes the reported actions of the authorities and regards them as positive steps towards reducing human rights abuses. The organization notes, however, that while periodic improvements or deterioration in the situation in different towns have been reported in the past, Amnesty International's concern is that a lasting improvement should be seen and abuses should cease.

### *Movement of refugees*

Recent press reports in *Borba*<sup>1</sup> provide more information about the operation of private agencies which organize the departure of those seeking to leave the Bosnian Serb-controlled areas. The reports confirm statements made by refugees. In one of the reports (*Borba*, 20 June 1994), Dragan Sali\_, head of the office for refugees in the *de facto* Bosnian Serb administration, stated that no local or international humanitarian organizations were participating in the organized departures and that they were being carried out exclusively by "private agencies". In another article (8 June 1994), *Borba* reports that one such "agency" in Bosanska Gradiška gives 70 per cent of the charges paid by its "clients" to the local commune.

In recent weeks groups of refugees have continued to leave the Bosnian Serb-controlled areas through these "agencies" and to arrive in Croatia. One group of 462 refugees who left Bosnian Serb-controlled territory on 14 June 1994 found themselves stranded in Sector West, one of the United Nations (UN) Protected Areas in Croatia, after the Croatian authorities refused to admit them into the government-controlled area of Croatia and announced that the admittance of such groups into Croatia would be temporarily halted. They cited a lack of accommodation and the re-registration of existing refugees in Croatia which was happening at the time as the reasons for their decision. Most of the group did not have all the papers required by the Croatian authorities for entry. Some 30 or 40 did have valid documents, but were denied entry with the rest of the group. The majority of the group were kept in Sector West for one week until entry was allowed following mediation by the UNHCR.

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<sup>1</sup> *Borba*, 8 June, 13 June and 20 June 1994.

### *Abuses in areas controlled by the authorities of the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina*

Amnesty International has appealed to the authorities in the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina<sup>2</sup> to take actions to ensure that Serbs and others are protected from human rights abuses. According to an article in *Borba* of 30 June, Serbs who had recently left the Bosnian Government-controlled town of Zenica reported the forcible mobilization of men of military age to fight in the Ozren area. They said that most recently, on 25 June, several hundred men had been taken in five buses to the front.

Amnesty International is also concerned about allegations that Serbs and other members of minorities, including Croats, in Bosnian Government-controlled areas, have been forced to perform work close to front lines, have been ill-treated by soldiers or police, or imprisoned as conscientious objectors. One such report concerned Milenko Marjanovic, a local official of the Croat Democratic Union party, who according to a report of Croatian Radio in Mostar was arrested on 30 June by the military police of the Second Corps of the Bosnia-Herzegovina Army, in front of about 20 residents of the Croat village of Lipnica near Tuzla, because he had refused to be mobilized.

Despite the renewed alliance between Bosnia's Muslims and Croats, a spokesman for the UNHCR stated on 4 July that Bosnian Croat militiamen in Mostar were still harassing Muslims and expelling them from the Croat quarter of the city. UNHCR staff in Mostar had reportedly been informed that some 80 people who had been driven from their homes in west Mostar had arrived in east Mostar (the Muslim side of the city) in the previous two weeks. The UNHCR spokesman, according to *Reuters*, cited a particular example: three soldiers of the Bosnian Croat forces (HVO) had beaten an elderly Muslim woman, crushing her hip with rifle butts, leaving her crippled (she had recently undergone hip reconstruction surgery). They had also allegedly ripped out her gold teeth using rubber gloves doused in petrol and torn out large clumps of her hair. She had then been evicted from her apartment.

Correction to Amnesty International's report, *"You have no place here": Abuses in Bosnian Serb-controlled areas* (AI Index: EUR 63/11/94 [abridged version EUR 63/12/94] June 1994).

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<sup>2</sup> The Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina includes the territories under the control of the mainly Muslim Sarajevo-based Bosnian Government and the Bosnian Croat authorities in the "Croatian Republic of Herzeg Bosna". The two agreed to form a federation in an agreement signed in Washington in March 1994.

The rape of the daughter of the victim mentioned on page 12, paragraph 3, (and on page 4, paragraph 4, of the abridged version) is not confirmed.

**KEYWORDS:** REFUGEES1 / TORTURE/ILL-TREATMENT1 / DISABLEMENT / FORCED LABOUR / CONSCRIPTION / MINORITIES / RELIGIOUS GROUPS - ISLAMIC / ETHNIC GROUPS / POLITICAL ACTIVISTS / CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS / WOMEN / AGED / POLICE / ARMED CIVILIANS / MILITARY POLICE / INVESTIGATION OF ABUSES / ARMED CONFLICT / ICRC / UNHCR /