

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

AI Index: EUR 63/18/93

Distr: UA/SC

UA 315/93

9 September 1993

Deliberate and arbitrary detention of civilians/deliberate and arbitrary killings/fear of torture and ill-treatment

**BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA: Detained Muslim civilians and prisoners of war in Bosnian Croat controlled areas of Bosnia-Herzegovina**

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Amnesty International is concerned about the detention of Muslim civilians and the ill-treatment and inhuman conditions to which they, together with captured combatants, have been exposed while in detention camps in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

The most recent information available to Amnesty International indicates that large numbers of Bosnian Muslim civilians continue to be held by Bosnian Croat (Croatian Defence Council [HVO]) forces. On Monday 6 September, delegates of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and press were, for the first time, allowed access to the Dretelj detention centre, a former military barracks, where they found 1,428 prisoners. However, according to a prisoner interviewed by a British journalist, a group of 125 inmates had, before the arrival of the ICRC mission, been removed to an unknown destination.

According to a report by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), by 20 August some 15,000 Muslims were reported to be held in camps in Grbavica, Dretelj, Stolac, Ljubuški, Gabela, Rodo\_ and a number of other places. The majority of them were civilians expelled from their homes in Mostar, \_apljina, Stolac and villages in the area.

Conditions were reported to be particularly bad at Dretelj camp, where some 2,500 detainees were believed to be held by 20 August. According to eyewitness accounts, detainees were held in conditions so cramped that they could not lie down to sleep. There have also been reports that Muslim prisoners of war held at Rodo\_ have been made to perform forced labour for the HVO close to the front-lines.

In a letter of 7 September, Croatian President, Franjo Tudjman, appealed to the HVO leader, Mate Boban, to treat prisoners humanely and to allow aid agencies to visit detention centres.

On 7 September, HVO commander, General Slobodan Praljak, claimed that his forces no longer held prisoners of war and that all HVO prisoner-of-war-camps had been shut down. However, the following day the ICRC requested urgent access to all detention camps in Bosnia, referring to consistent reports about the existence of further detention centres to which so far no international agencies had gained access.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

It appears that a total of over 1,500 Muslim detainees were released from various HVO detention centres in the week of 29 August 1993, including, on 1 September, some 350 from the camp in Dretelj. About a 100 of them were seen by UNHCR officials in Jablanica.

Those released complained that, especially during June and July, their treatment had been inhuman. They had been given hardly any water or food, were subjected to regular and arbitrary beatings - five were reportedly killed - and there was no sanitation. Conditions had improved when a new commander took over the camp in late July.

Before the outbreak of war in Bosnia-Herzegovina in March 1992, Mostar had a mixed population dominated by Muslims and Croats in roughly equal numbers. Since May 1993, Mostar has been the scene of continual hostilities between Bosnian Croat and Bosnian Government forces who previously had an uneasy alliance against the Bosnian Serb forces.

On 28 August 1993, Mate Boban, president of the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) -- sister party of its namesake in Croatia -- proclaimed the "Croatian Republic of Herzeg-Bosna". The projected territory of this entity is an as yet not fully defined area concentrated around the traditionally Croat-dominated region of Western Herzegovina.

There have also been reports of Croatian civilians detained by Bosnian Government forces in detention centres in central Bosnia as well as some in the Mostar. The ICRC has recently seen 24 Bosnian Government controlled detention centres, where a total of 1,250 Croat and Serb prisoners were registered. The Bosnian Croat leaders claimed on 1 September 1993 that 4,500 Croat prisoners were held in central Bosnia.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send faxes/express and airmail letters either in English, French, German or in your own language:**

- expressing concern about reports of detention of civilians, and of the ill-treatment and inhuman conditions to which Muslim civilians and captured combatants have reportedly been exposed;
- stressing that Amnesty International is concerned for victims of all nationalities and is regularly appealing to all sides involved in the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina;
- urging the release of all civilians detained solely because of their national or ethnic origin or held as hostages;
- urging that Croatian forces in Bosnia-Herzegovina abide by fundamental human rights and humanitarian law standards, in particular the four 1949 Geneva Conventions and additional protocols;
- urging that international humanitarian organizations, such as the International Red Cross, be given access to all places where Croatian forces are holding detainees;
- stressing that no one - whether detained or not - should be tortured or subjected to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment;
- stating that Amnesty International believes that abuses committed by one side cannot be used as justification for acts carried out by another.

**APPEALS TO:**

1. Leader of the Croatian Defence Council (HVO)

Mate Boban  
 Ured Hrvatskog Vijeća Obrane  
 88340 Grude  
 Croatia (for Bosnia-Herzegovina)

**Faxes: +38 58 366 019**

**Salutation: Dear Mr Boban**

(Please note that, since postal services to Bosnia-Herzegovina are unreliable, it may be better to send faxes where possible)

2. President of the Republic of Croatia

His Excellency Dr Franjo Tudjman  
 Predsjednik Republike Hrvatske  
 Visoka 22  
 41000 Zagreb

Croatia

**Telegrams: President of Croatia, Zagreb, Croatia**

**Faxes: + 38 41 444 532**

**Salutation: Dear President**

(Please note: Although President Tudjman does not officially have direct control over the Bosnian Croat forces, he has admitted support for the HVO. Urge him to do everything in his power to ensure that the concerns stated above are addressed.)

and to diplomatic representatives of Croatia in your country.

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.** Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 21 October 1993.