

UA 352/93 Fear of arbitrary killing/fear of torture/
forcible expulsion

5 October 1993

BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA: Muslims and Croats in the Serbian controlled town of Banja Luka

Amnesty International is concerned for the safety of those Muslims and Croats who remain in Banja Luka in north-western Bosnia. It believes they are at serious risk of torture, ill-treatment, rape and arbitrary killings. Bosnian Serbs and the Yugoslav National army took control of the area in April 1992, and abuses have occurred constantly since then. Reports indicate that such abuses, possibly intended to force non-Serbs from the area, have been increasing recently.

Recent cases have included the reported arrest and ill-treatment of two prominent members of the Party of Democratic Action (SDA), the main Muslim party in Bosnia-Herzegovina. One was arrested on 16 September 1993 and held for over a week. He was reportedly badly beaten during detention and needed hospital treatment. The second victim was apparently made to perform forced labour and was beaten so badly that he urinated blood. These cases are representative of daily incidents of beatings of other Muslims or Croats. A report on 1 October spoke of attacks on elderly people such as the rape of two 65-year-old women and an attack on an elderly couple in which the 80-year-old wife was left stripped naked after being attacked and beaten by armed men.

Although the perpetrators are often unidentified, they are frequently uniformed and armed and appear to be soldiers or irregulars. Their actions fit into a systematic pattern aimed at causing the remaining Muslims and Croats to flee. Other forms of pressure on them have included call-ups into the Bosnian-Serb army (where men have been made to work near frontlines) or the bombing of houses and religious objects such as mosques. All mosques in the town are now reported to have been destroyed.

Throughout 1993 there has been a steady stream of Muslim and Croat refugees leaving Serbian-controlled northwestern Bosnia, passing into Croatia and then frequently to third countries. Almost all have paid large amounts of foreign currency for bus journeys and "exit taxes" have been extorted from them. They have sought places on the convoys of buses out of fear for their security if they remain and Amnesty International considers that they have effectively been forcibly expelled.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

A recent rebellion in Banja Luka by soldiers angry at the actions of war profiteers created a particularly uncertain situation in the town. There are no indications that the situation of the minorities has improved since the collapse of the rebellion.

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

- expressing concern about reports of human rights violations against non-Serbs in the town of Banja Luka in recent weeks;
- urging the authorities to take urgent measures to ensure that the local security forces or irregulars are effectively controlled and that strict orders are issued to ensure that they abide by international human rights and humanitarian law standards;

Note: Although postal services to Yugoslavia and Serbian-controlled Bosnia-Herzegovina are disrupted, earlier appeals have been delivered. Please insist at your post office that the letters can be delivered.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 16 November 1993.