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Bosnia-Herzegovina: dignified burials for the victims of Srebrenica a vital condition for just peace and reconciliation

On 31 March survivors of the 1995 Srebrenica massacres will finally bury almost 600 of their dead. As they do so Amnesty International calls upon the Republika Srpska (RS) authorities to honour their obligations to all victims of the tragedy and their families by fully and impartially investigating the human rights violations which happened in Srebrenica, as they were ordered by the Human Rights Chamber earlier this month.

The organization has long held that "disappearances" are ongoing crimes, which continue until the fate and whereabouts of the victims have been established and the perpetrators brought to justice. In the case of the Srebrenica massive "disappearances", despite the increased rate of identification of exhumed victims, no one has yet been prosecuted in any court in the RS for their involvement in these human rights violations.

"In order to begin the process of justice and reconciliation the authorities must fully and immediately implement the decision issued by the Human Rights Chamber of Bosnia and Herzegovina in a case brought by 49 Srebrenica survivors earlier this month", Amnesty International said. "In particular the need for a comprehensive investigation into the grave human rights violations that were committed after the fall of the enclave is paramount, in order to establish the truth and to bring to justice those responsible".

However, Amnesty International shares the concerns voiced by many of the Srebrenica Bosniaks that investigations into the Srebrenica massacre by Bosnian Serb police run a serious risk of being jeopardized and compromised. The organization has repeatedly raised the persistent delays and shortcomings that have so far marred the very few cases of "disappearances" where police investigations were opened. Such ambitious and complex investigations must be overseen by the international community, notably by police and legal experts of the European Union Police Mission.

The organization furthermore stressed the need, given repeated reports of vandalism and desecrations of graves of minorities throughout the country, for the authorities to ensure that the Srebrenica grave site and memorial will be protected against acts of violence and disrespect by anyone in the local community. "Ensuring respect for the graves of and memorials sites dedicated to victims of "disappearances" and extrajudicial executions must be an integral part of the overall process of reparation", Amnesty International said.

Background

On 5 March Amnesty International launched a report entitled "*Bosnia-Herzegovina: Honouring the ghosts-ending impunity for "disappearances"*", which reiterates the organization's concerns and recommendations on what it considers to be one of the most serious persisting human rights violations in the country. The report calls for urgent steps to be taken in the field of legal reform, the launch of immediate police and judicial investigations into all cases of "disappearances" and the need to guarantee the relatives of the "disappeared" their right to redress and reparation, including compensation.

On 7 March the Human Rights Chamber of Bosnia and Herzegovina, a domestic court including international judges, issued its decision in a case brought by 49 relatives of missing men and boys from Srebrenica. The Chamber ruled that by failing to disclose any information to the relatives of the missing of the fate and whereabouts of their loved ones the RS violated their human rights. The RS authorities were ordered to immediately disclose such information as well as the location of mass grave sites and to open a comprehensive investigation into the events in Srebrenica. In addition, the authorities were ordered to pay a total of 4 Million Konvertible Marks (approximately 2 Million Euros) for the collective benefit of all applicants and families of Srebrenica victims to the Foundation of the Srebrenica-Potocari Memorial and Cemetery.

For more information please see:

<http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGEUR630072003?open&of=ENG-BIH>

<http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGEUR630042003?open&of=ENG-BIH>

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