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BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

Whereabouts Unknown: Minors "missing" from Srebrenica¹

Among the more than 6,000 "missing" from Srebrenica enclave are more than 100 people, almost exclusively boys, under eighteen years of age. They include both those who were separated from women, elderly and other children when they were evacuated from the United Nations (UN) protected "safe area", and others who never arrived on Bosnian Government controlled territory after going on foot through the forest. Many of them may have been afraid that they would assumed to be of military age and thus treated as prisoners-of-war.

As Bosnian Serb Army (BSA) forces took control of Srebrenica enclave on 10 July 1995, approximately 15,000 Bosnian Muslims gathered on a hill outside Srebrenica. Although this group was comprised primarily of men who had served with the Bosnian Government Army, many teenage boys who were afraid of being taken for soldiers as well as women were among them. They departed on foot across the forested and mountainous terrain to try to reach Bosnian Government controlled territory, approximately 50 kilometres to the north-west. Those who travelled through the forests were subject to ambushes by the BSA and many of those who were captured have never been seen since.

The approximately 25,000 remaining civilians who had been inside the enclave fled the advancing troops to Potočari, an industrial town four kilometres north of Srebrenica where the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) had its main base in the enclave, to await evacuation to Bosnian Government territory.

But at Potočari, the BSA separated men from the women and took them to unknown locations. Although the men who were taken away at Potočari were again primarily of military age, Amnesty International has received numerous reports of the elderly and

¹For more detailed information on the Bosnian Serb capture of Srebrenica and Amnesty International's concerns about the "missing" of Srebrenica, please see *To bury my brothers' bones*, (AI Index: 63/15/96), July 1996.
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children, including boys as young as 13, being led away from their families. Halil Mehić was 16 years old, but fearing his fate should he be separated from his family, he disguised himself as a woman and held his sister's baby in his arms to get by the Bosnian Serb forces, who separated, as Halil puts it, "anyone who could hold a gun", regardless of whether they were civilians or not.

The fate of the "missing"

While some of those "missing" may have been killed in battle or were victims of shelling targeted at combatants, an enormous number of the people separated from the civilians at Potočari or captured while fleeing to Bosnian Government-held territory were deliberately and arbitrarily killed by BSA forces. This is the inescapable conclusion of most observers, based on evidence which includes the testimony of those who claim to have survived the executions, witnesses' testimonies, a confession from a BSA soldier who claims to have participated in mass executions, on-the-spot investigations by journalists, preliminary exhumations of mass graves, and photographic evidence from United States intelligence sources. The killings, in what appears to be an extensive BSA operation, took place either at the site of capture, while prisoners were temporarily detained in one of many improvised centres, or after they were transported to one of various sites used for mass executions.

While important for the prosecution of those responsible, the mere confirmation that mass executions took place is of little solace to the family members who want to know what happened to particular individuals: to be reunited if they are alive, and to have a place to mourn them if they are among the dead. Although some of the grave sites may have been tampered with and a comprehensive picture may never be possible, until all detention centres have been reported and the mass graves are exhumed, it will be impossible to satisfy the wishes of the relatives to know what happened to the individuals who comprise the more than 6,000 unaccounted for people from Srebrenica. Finding out the truth about all the "disappeared" and "missing" is a crucial component of the future stability of the region, and for many of those relatives who have also been displaced by the conflict, it is a precondition for returning to their homes.

The following are some young people about whom Amnesty International has gathered information. Aside from those who were last seen in Bosnian Serb custody at Potočari, it is impossible, by the very nature of the cases, to know whether they are all deliberately "missing." Nevertheless, the available information on events in Srebrenica in July 1995 makes it likely and thus gives Amnesty International cause for concern.

Hazim Hasanović (born 1978)

Hasan Hasanović and his 17-year-old son Hazim Hasanović decided to go with the group through the forest. The father and son were separated in the chaos surrounding the attacks on the group near Konjević Polje, and although Hasan Hasanović eventually made his way to Bosnian Government-held territory, his son was not with him. Hasan was desperate for news of his son when he talked to Amnesty International delegates in July 1995. A year later, Hazim Hasanović remains on the list of those "missing".

Suad Suljić (born 1978)

Rifat Suljić, his 17-year old son Suad Suljić and two older brothers all left Srebrenica with the main body of men; his wife and three other younger children went to Potočari. When the men came under attack between Buljim and Konjević Polje, the group spread out in panic and Rifat Suljić lost contact with his son.

Edin Ahmetović (born 1977) and Semir Ahmetović (born 1979)

Edin and Semir Ahmetović are two of Šaha Ahmetović's grandsons, and among 18 of her male descendants who remain unaccounted for after leaving Srebrenica. Šaha Ahmetović, who is 73 years old, lived in the village of Žedanjsko about 10 kilometres east of Srebrenica). Out of 18 male descendants, the only male relative in her family currently accounted for is her grandson Hajrudin Ahmetović (born 1972).

Jasmin Zukić (born 1978), Senad Zukić (born 1980)

Sevdina Latifović, originally from Karačić near Srebrenica, was 19 years' old in July 1995. Her immediate family went to Potočari; as her father, Ramo Zukić, worked in the post office for UNPROFOR and believed that they would ensure their safe evacuation. Ramo Zukić and Sevdina's two brothers, Jasmin and Senad, are all "missing" after their abduction by Bosnian Serbs from Potočari.

Ramo and Jasmin Zukić were abducted by Bosnian Serbs as they approached the UN base at Potočari to seek help on 12 July. While they were on their way, Bosnian Serb soldiers accosted and took both men away. Sevdina described what happened:

"They asked [Jasmin] how old he was. He said 17, but they didn't believe him. He tried to explain but they just swore and grabbed him and led him away."

Sevdina became tearful when she recalled her brother Jasmin:

"He had dark hair, a fine face, and he was tall. He liked to be alone. He was always alone, reading something. He didn't like to just hang out in the town, but would rather be on his own or with his two best friends."

Her younger brother, Senad Zukić went "missing" the following day when Bosnian Serbs segregated males of supposedly military age from the women, children and the elderly as they waited to board the evacuation buses.

Muharem Mujić (born 1980)

Muharem Mujić, his uncle Šahin Isaković and grandfather Hakija Isaković (aged about 70 years) all went to Potočari. On 12 July, they were going to board the busses when all three men were separated from their female relatives and taken away into the basement of a nearby building. When one of their female relatives spoke to Amnesty International delegates in July 1995, she was anxious about Muharem, who had been very ill with stomach problems.

Sifet Mehanović (born 1978)

Ramiza Mehanović spent two nights in Potočari with her father Atif Mehanović, her two brothers, Ramiz Mehanović and Sabahudin Mehanović, and her 16 years old nephew, Sifet Mehanović.

The first night, her brother, Sabahudin, was taken away. When Ramiza was evacuated from Potočari, she reported that only women and children were allowed onto the busses, while men were sent in another direction. Her father, Atif, her brother Ramiz, and her nephew, Sifet, were taken away in this way.

