

# £BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

## @Living for the day - Forcible expulsions from Bijeljina and Janja

### Introduction

#### *Forcible expulsions continue in Bosnian Serb-controlled areas*

"I live for that day - for Karad\_i\_'s signature."

(Statement from a Muslim woman from Bijeljina, expelled in September 1994, referring to her hope that the Bosnian Serb representative at the United Nations-European Union sponsored negotiations on the former Yugoslavia, would sign the latest peace proposals by 15 October 1994 and she would be able to return home.)

"I would have left a year ago but my Serb neighbour said, 'Don't be a fool, don't leave your house. Muslims and Serbs can live together.' I believed him. Suddenly all this started to happen, the expulsions. We were really surprised. We thought the war would be finished soon and if we could have stayed there, we would. I think everyone thought the same as me - that we could live together."

(Statement by another woman from Bijeljina.)

These two quotations from recently displaced Muslim women from the Bosnian Serb-controlled town of Bijeljina in northeastern Bosnia-Herzegovina reflect the dilemma which the Muslims in Bijeljina and Janja have faced for more than 30 months. Many had resolved to stay, to adapt to the new situation, and to wait for a resolution of the conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

This document is based largely on interviews with displaced persons conducted by Amnesty International in Tuzla, Bosnia-Herzegovina, in October 1994. The individuals had all left their homes in Serbian-controlled areas between July and September 1994. Many wished to speak anonymously as they still had relatives in the areas under Bosnian Serb control and were concerned for their safety (some had been explicitly threatened not to speak). To protect these people, all names used here are pseudonyms and some details have been omitted.

### *The pattern of human rights abuses and Amnesty International's concerns*

The statements of the displaced Muslims interviewed by Amnesty International confirm that the pattern of human rights abuses which has occurred in northeastern Bosnia recently is similar to that used to force out Muslims, Croats, Roma or other minorities from the areas controlled by Bosnian Serb forces and reduce the non-Serb population to the minimum.<sup>1</sup>

The recent abuses in Bijeljina and Janja include: direct physical expulsion of Muslims who were taken from their homes late at night and made to cross front lines to Bosnian Government-controlled territory; arbitrary detention of civilian males of military age (some of those who were detained are unaccounted for and may have "disappeared"); forcing men to perform work in dangerous areas close to front lines (in effect, using them as "human shields"); ill-treatment by soldiers or police of individuals in their homes or in detention. These, and other alleged abuses, have been accompanied by other pressures on Muslims in the towns, which form a pattern clearly aimed at causing Muslims who have not been forcibly expelled to seek to leave.

Bijeljina and Janja were relatively peaceful in comparison with many other Bosnian Serb-controlled areas apart from one week at the start of the war in April 1992, when around 40 Muslims and ethnic Albanians were killed in Bijeljina. Many members of the Muslim population decided to remain and live as best they could, despite pressures arising from dismissals from work, forced mobilizations or forced labour, lack of access to health care and some violent attacks or robberies. The violence, however, was not as frequent as that seen in Banja Luka or Prijedor. It was common in the former Yugoslavia to invest private wealth in houses. Many of those who were most reluctant to leave Janja were those who had most of their wealth and means of supporting themselves invested in their house or farmland.

In July 1994 a systematic program began which was clearly aimed at expelling the remaining Muslims and extorting property and money from them. The expulsions, and many events surrounding them, were organized by an official or semi-official "exchange commission" working in Bijeljina. By late September, when the rate of departures peaked, more than 6,000 Muslims had been expelled or had left the towns by paying and registering for "voluntary" departures. Up to 600 men of military age had been taken into detention.

The program began in mid-July when about 70 men were rounded up and taken to detention camps where they had to perform forced labour (sometimes in dangerous areas, close to front lines). Some men were tortured or ill-treated in detention, some appear to have "disappeared". Relatives did not get prompt (or sometimes any) acknowledgment of their detention from the authorities.

At the same time as the detentions began several hundred Muslims were rounded up in the middle of the night, after being given a few minutes to pack. They were then driven to

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<sup>1</sup> See the Amnesty International reports *Bosnia-Herzegovina: "You have no place here": Abuses in Bosnian Serb-controlled areas*, AI Index: EUR 63/11/94, June 1994 and the update, AI Index: EUR 63/15/94, July 1994.

the front line and made to cross to Bosnian Government-controlled territory. Many were reportedly the wealthy, educated and prominent members of the Muslim community. Although it was not the first such occurrence in these towns, the new expulsions of such people and new detentions shattered what sense of security the Muslims in Bijeljina and Janja still had. Word spread around the towns that the "exchange commission" which was behind the expulsions would allow other people to leave without hindrance in return for payment. By now it was clear to the Muslims that the latest events were a message to them: they could either pay, and perhaps leave in an orderly and dignified manner, or they could expect to be rounded up without warning in the middle of the night and expelled or, in the case of men of military age, be taken into detention. Many would have known that civilian detainees were commonly released only by being exchanged for prisoners of war or civilian detainees held by the other side and might effectively be expelled in any case.

Over the following weeks, thousands of Muslims registered to leave. However, those who paid to leave were subject to the same intimidation and humiliation as those who were expelled in the same period. Even some who had paid to leave were rounded up without warning. People (both those who had been rounded up and those who had paid) were taken to an assembly point, frequently a pheasant farm at Suvo Polje near Lopare, about 35 kilometres from Janja. There, victims were made to hand over almost all of their foreign currency. Threats or body searches were sometimes used to facilitate this. Lists were made of those departing, and sometimes victims had to sign documents confirming that their departure was "voluntary". They were sometimes warned not to speak of their ordeal after reaching Tuzla, and threatened that if they did, there would be reprisals against their relatives who remained behind. Those expelled spent the night at the assembly point before being taken to the front line where they would be made to cross to Bosnian Government-controlled territory. Sometimes they had to walk close to minefields or were made to cross while there was shelling in the area. Some who were slow were struck by soldiers, and a few were robbed at this point.

Men of military age typically paid 10 times as much as others (1,500 German Marks as opposed to about 150). Despite paying, men of military age were often separated from the women, children and older men at Lopare and taken into detention rather than being allowed to cross to Tuzla.

To maintain the pressure, further groups of Muslims who had not paid to leave were rounded up from their houses and forcibly expelled in August and September. Men continued to be taken from their homes and detained for forced labour. There were also threats or violence against Muslims perpetrated by soldiers, police or displaced Serbian civilians (who had little fear of prosecution).

The program of expulsions and intimidation, which was orchestrated by the local *de facto* authorities, or carried out with their tacit consent, means that the departure of thousands who paid to leave can hardly be considered voluntary.

## **Background - Bijeljina and Janja during the first two years of the war**

Bijeljina and Janja lie about 10 kilometres apart in northeast Bosnia close to the river Drina, which forms the border with Serbia. Until the start of the war in April 1992 Bijeljina town had a majority of Serbs, but about 22,000 Muslim inhabitants. Janja had an almost exclusively Muslim population of around 10,000 with only around 500 or 600 Serbs. There were also mixed marriages, particularly in Bijeljina. The villages surrounding the towns were almost exclusively inhabited by Serbs.

### *The Serbian take-over of Bijeljina in April 1992*

In the first week of April 1992 paramilitaries from Serbia, mainly from a unit organized and commanded by *\_eljko Ra\_natovi\_* ("Arkan") reportedly killed up to 40 Muslims and ethnic Albanians in Bijeljina. Most reports agree that little resistance was offered by Muslims in the town and that many of the victims appear to have been deliberately and arbitrarily killed. Muslim shops and businesses were ransacked and burned out while Serbian-owned shops were left untouched. After several days of shooting incidents it was announced that if the Muslims handed in all their weapons there would be no further trouble for them. The Muslims duly handed over what weapons they had.

However, the problems did not stop there. Arms searches began and men, particularly locally prominent ones such as politicians or businessmen, were taken away for interrogation. Some did not return. The frequent detention of Muslims for questioning carried on for some weeks. Muslim police officers were dismissed and replaced with Serbs who were not trained police officers and were frequently recruited from the growing population of displaced Serbs arriving in the area.

### *The situation in Janja*

After the killings in Bijeljina, a large column of JNA (*Jugoslovenska Narodna Armija* -Yugoslav People's Army<sup>2</sup>) tanks arrived in Janja from Zvornik and other areas and surrounded the town. An ultimatum was then delivered to the population of Janja to hand over all guns to the Serbian forces. *\_eljko Ra\_natovi\_* himself gave a speech in which he reportedly guaranteed the Muslims' safety if the arms were handed over. Serbs from the SDS (*Srpska Demokratska Stranka* - Serbian Democratic Party, the main Serbian nationalist party in Bosnia-Herzegovina), and its allies took over from the elected authorities in Janja.

Guns were handed over to the new *de facto* local authorities. No armed clashes between Serbs and the local Muslims were reported either before or after the weapons were handed over. In the period following the Serbian take-over Muslim policemen were

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<sup>2</sup> In May 1992 the JNA officially withdrew from Bosnia-Herzegovina. However, large amounts of equipment remained and Bosnian Serb members were transformed into the Bosnian Serb army.

dismissed. Muslims in other jobs were also dismissed over the following months. People with skills which the authorities considered useful kept their jobs, but by late 1993 almost all had been dismissed.<sup>3</sup> A number of Muslims, particularly those who had been politically active, left Janja by whatever means they could.

### *Movements of population*

From April and May 1992 Muslims were expelled en masse from other towns in eastern Bosnia. Most fled or were driven into Serbia or Montenegro from where they left for third countries, though a small number of these people arrived in Janja. By August about 1,000 Muslims had arrived in Janja. However, larger numbers of Serbs who had fled or been expelled from towns under the control of the mainly Muslim Bosnian Army or Bosnian Croat forces also started to arrive in the town. With the assistance of the new Serbian authorities they took over empty houses of Muslims who were working abroad before the outbreak of war or who had fled since the start of the war.

By late July more than 30,000 displaced Serbs had arrived in the commune. The displaced Serbs were usually much more hostile towards the Muslim population than the local Serbs. Muslims from the towns made a distinction between many of their Serbian friends and neighbours, who frequently helped and protected them, and the newcomers, to whom they attributed many of the problems. In time their Serbian friends and neighbours started to feel intimidated themselves and unable to help.

There were violent robberies, some of which may have had a nationalist nature. Many of the displaced Serbs were mobilized into the army or police force.

It was reportedly because of the influx of displaced Serbs that in 1992 the *de facto* authorities requested that the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) establish an office in the area to assist with humanitarian aid for the displaced Serbs.

### *The "exchange commission" and "Mauzer guards" or "Vojkan's men"*

During 1992 a "Commission for the Exchange of Population" was set up in Bijeljina. Although it appeared to be semi-official, it later became clear that it was vying for power with some of the various Serbian factions in the area. The commission was run by a local Serb called Vojislav Djuri\_i\_ (also known as Vojkan), who soon became notorious in Bijeljina and Janja. He reportedly had connections with \_eljko Ra\_natovi\_ and was a local leader of Ra\_natovi\_'s far-right nationalist party, the *Stranka Srpskog Jedinstva* (SSJ - Party of Serbian Unity).

It appears that at first the commission was engaged in organizing the departure of those Muslims who sought to leave. Vojislav Djuri\_i\_ and others tried to propagate the idea that Serbs were endangered in the Bosnian Government-controlled town of Tuzla and

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<sup>3</sup> *Borba*, 7 October 1993.

agitated for Serbs to be allowed to leave Tuzla. Some of the Muslims whom the commission took out of Bijeljina or Janja apparently went in exchange for Serbs from Tuzla<sup>4</sup>. Muslims needed permission to leave Bijeljina or Janja and either left via the commission or by paying smugglers to take them to Serbia.

The semi-official "travel agencies" operating in other Bosnian Serb-controlled towns generally relied for their "business" on Muslims, Croats or Roma who came to them either fearing, or having experienced, violence or eviction by various military or paramilitary personnel or civilians. However, in Bijeljina and Janja the "exchange commission" had its own military or paramilitary group which was responsible both for intimidating and expelling Muslims.

The unit was known to the locals as the "Mauzer guards" from the nickname of their commander, Ljubiša Savić - "Mauzer". Some people also referred to them as the "Panthers" or "Vojkan's men"; believing them to operate in close collaboration with Vojislav Djurić. It is probable that the names "Mauzer guards" and "Vojkan's men" are synonymous, but the name used by the source will be used in future references. The displaced Muslims usually described the "Mauzer guards" (or "Vojkan's men") as wearing white belts like those worn by military policemen in the VRS ("*Vojska Republike Srpske*" - The Army of the "Serbian Republic"). Vojislav Djurić referred to himself as a "Major in the special unit of the Eleventh Corps of the Army of the Serbian Republic".<sup>5</sup> He was mostly seen wearing civilian clothes in Bijeljina or Janja, but military uniform when he was seen near the front lines.

It is not clear exactly how many men are in the "Mauzer guards" or how they fit into the VRS and the local civilian and police power structures. It is, however, clear that the forces of "Mauzer" and Vojislav Djurić operated independently of the town police in Bijeljina. Armed clashes are alleged to have occurred in August or September 1994 between "Vojkan's men" and the local police in Bijeljina when the local police tried to prevent some forcible expulsions. There are also allegations that armed clashes have occurred between the VRS and Vojkan's troops when VRS commanders denied them access to the front line.

### *Other pressures on Muslims*

In April 1992 three of Janja's five mosques were destroyed. The two remaining were blown up by Serbian paramilitaries in March 1993.

From the summer of 1992, men who had been dismissed from their jobs started to be called-up for work obligations or were mobilized into the Bosnian Serb Army. One man who was mobilized into the VRS in October 1992 told Amnesty International:

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<sup>4</sup> Serbs being prosecuted by the authorities in Tuzla for refusing call-up to the army were among those exchanged in 1993 although it is not clear whether they were exchanged for civilians or prisoners of war. Others who sought to leave may have been offered for exchange.

<sup>5</sup> *Borba*, 6 October 1993.

"In 1992 I refused the order to go to the Serbian army. Military police were waiting for me at my home and when I returned they put me in a car and beat me ... At the front line we had rifles and were told to shoot at the HVO [Bosnian Croat forces]. The Serbs were behind us. We feared for our families. We were in uniform."

Work obligations included performing various manual tasks without pay. Sometimes this involved dangerous tasks such as digging trenches near the front lines. Six men were allegedly killed doing this near Teo\_ak on 13 May 1994. Most of those interviewed by Amnesty International who had performed such work said that firing from the Bosnian Army side usually stopped when civilians were observed working near the lines. In effect they were used as human shields.

Some Muslims alleged that they had been harassed by displaced Serbs who were either looking for accommodation or had moved in to share Muslim homes at the insistence of the authorities. A recent incident is described on page 9; similar incidents occurred in 1993.

Although Muslims were reluctant to report many incidents to the police, it is probable that all killings, whether or not they had an ethnic aspect, came to their attention. At least some cases were pursued by the authorities. For example, the Belgrade-based Humanitarian Law Fund reports being told that 12 young Serbs were convicted of the killings of 12 Muslims, including three children, in four separate incidents in late 1993 and early 1994.<sup>6</sup>

Because of the pressures on them, many Muslims agreed to sign declarations of loyalty to the *de facto* Serbian authorities in 1992 and 1993. One man told Amnesty International:

"We wanted to live in Janja. We signed a loyalty document in 1993. We didn't care who ruled. We didn't want to leave. You have nothing else but your house ...The loyalty document said: 'Do you agree to live in the Serbian Republic?' It was a list of names by house, not a separate document for each person. Those who were expelled recently had all signed this document. They were educated people on the list."

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<sup>6</sup> The Humanitarian Law Fund, *Spotlight Report No.14, Expulsion of National Minorities (Banja Luka and Bijeljina)*, August 1994.

### *Janja, January 1993: the Milki\_ killing and demonstration*

The relative calm in Janja was abruptly broken by the first widely reported murder of Muslims to occur in the town since the Serbian takeover. One morning in late January 1993 Ibrahim Milki\_ and a female relative were found murdered in their lounge. No one saw the perpetrators, but neighbours who discovered their bodies showed them to others before the police arrived. Indignation quickly spread around the town and by the early afternoon a spontaneous demonstration of several hundred women developed in the centre of the town. The local police at first took limited action to disperse it, although one witness claims that they started to use truncheons to beat the women. Passing vehicles were stopped by the demonstrators.

Women interviewed recently by Amnesty International who were present at the demonstration were all clear that the protesters demanded that the authorities protect them from violence. One woman remembered people shouting: "We want to leave Janja! What about Arkan's guarantee of safety?". Despite this, it is not clear that there was a widespread desire to leave at this time.

After a while police reinforcements arrived from Bijeljina and broke up the demonstration. This time the police reportedly started to beat everybody they could grab with truncheons and fired shots in the air with automatic weapons. Stray shots reportedly hit and killed a woman called Durgutovi\_ (aged around 60 years) who was in her flat overlooking the street.

### *Expulsions from Bijeljina - autumn 1993*

It was in Bijeljina that the next great shock came. There had been some reports of the expulsion of 17 Muslims from Bijeljina to Hungary via Serbia in March, but a much more serious wave of expulsions began in August. According to the Belgrade-based Humanitarian Law Fund<sup>7</sup>, the expulsions were organized by Vojislav Djuri\_i\_'s "exchange commission". On 24 August 1993 another 17 Muslims were rounded up and taken by bus through Serbia to the Hungarian border. In the following two days another group of between 30 and 40 people was expelled by being made to cross the lines to the Bosnian Government-controlled town of Tuzla. After a third group of about 33 people from Tesli\_ was expelled through Serbia on 29 August, the Yugoslav border police stated that they would not allow this to happen again. Further expulsions were towards Tuzla. The Humanitarian Law Fund estimated that 350 Muslims had been expelled by mid-September. Lists of those to be expelled were prepared in advance. The Bijeljina authorities told the Humanitarian Law Fund that they were implementing a policy of the "governmental institutions of the *Republika Srpska*" to reduce the number of Muslims and that the decision provided that only five per cent of the 22,000 Muslims in Bijeljina would be allowed to stay. The Muslims to be expelled were those who

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<sup>7</sup> The Humanitarian Law Fund, *Spotlight Report No.7, Bijeljina in Black*, 15 September 1993.

had moved to Bijeljina from other parts of Bosnia or the former Yugoslavia in the last 20 or so years, those who allegedly took part in the "armed uprising" in Bijeljina in late March and early April 1992, and those who were regarded as "disloyal" or "politically" suspect.

Probably as a result of the fear of expulsion, about 100 Muslims in Bijeljina decided to go further in displaying their loyalty to the new authorities, or at least to be less conspicuous, by changing their characteristic Muslim names to Serbian ones.

### *Harassment by police*

As soon as the empty Muslim houses were filled up in Bijeljina and Janja, displaced Serbs arriving in the towns started to take over parts of houses still occupied by Muslims. The authorities assisted the displaced Serbs in finding room. Although some Muslim families reported that their guests were polite and cooperative, there were inevitably many conflicts. Muslims were reluctant to report incidents to the police (who were themselves often displaced persons), feeling that they were second-class citizens and that the displaced Serbs enjoyed the tacit approval of the authorities for their actions.

For example, Esad in Bijeljina was forced to take in displaced Serbs. One afternoon in early July 1994, not long after moving in, one of the guests falsely accused him of possessing arms, and reported him to the police. Three policemen arrived and beat him with truncheons about the upper part of his body. Before leaving they ransacked part of the house and took away personal documents and property which were never returned.

One afternoon in July police picked up Rifat (aged about 60 years) in the street after going to his house and arresting his wife, whom he alleges they beat. They took them back to his house. He stated:

"As soon as we got into the yard they started to hit me in the face. I asked what the problem was and they told me to shut up and go into the house. They swore at me and my wife ... They took us into the room where the refugees were and planted us on two chairs and started to hit us. One Serb shouted 'You will go to Alija'<sup>8</sup> and threatened to poke our eyes out and continued to hit us around the face."

He was taken to the police station:

"There they sat me on a chair again and hit me again about the face. By then my face was bleeding badly and my eyes were closing. Then he took out a truncheon, that policeman, C, and hit me on the left shoulder. Then I fell from the chair. He put me back on the chair and hit me with the truncheon on my head. Then I fell again and passed out. He put me back on the chair again half-conscious

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<sup>8</sup> Referring to the Bosnian President, Alija Izetbegović, a Muslim.

and began to hit me again and told me to run home. I started off down the corridor out of the police station. He kicked me in the legs and buttocks all the way to the entrance."

The next day three other police officers came and assured him that it would not happen again. The victim believes that somebody else had complained on his behalf.

### **July 1994: a further wave of expulsions from Bijeljina and Janja**

In late June or early July 1994 the remaining telephone lines to Muslim-occupied houses were cut off in Bijeljina. There were also other ominous activities such as Vojkan's soldiers making inventories of Muslims' property.

In mid-July new round-ups and detention of men of military age began. According to the statement of one man, Mustafa, "Mauzer guards" detained him and about 30 other men of military age in Janja on the morning of 14 July. Late in the afternoon they were taken to the village of Hase near Lopare where they were unloaded at a school and stood against a wall inside. Other men who were brought from Bijeljina were put in another room. That evening four men from Janja were reportedly beaten with rifle butts. One displayed bruises on his chest, back and stomach the next day. He was also seen to urinate blood, but was reportedly refused medical attention when he asked for it.

The next morning, after sleeping in a sports changing room, about 70 men were separated into three groups and taken off to camps in Lopare, Jablanica and Piperi. The camp at Lopare was a farm where the men slept in a cattle shed. The men held there worked eight or nine hours a day on agricultural tasks. Elsewhere, men held at another location at Greda were made to dig trenches on the front lines. There was regular automatic fire in the area and Bosnian army soldiers were reported to be so close that a Muslim soldier even threw cigarettes to the detainees.

On 15 July the new forcible expulsions began. About 140 Muslims from Bijeljina were made to cross the front lines at Šatorovići the following day. Many had been rounded up from their homes, although some had apparently sought to leave. In the following days more groups of people were rounded up from their homes in Bijeljina and Janja and forcibly expelled. Prominent members of the Muslim community were a particular target, as if to send a message to the whole community that their time was coming to an end. For example, at about 11.30pm on Sunday 25 July 1994 an armed man wearing a camouflage uniform knocked at the door of Munevra in Bijeljina. He told her that she and her family had 10 minutes to pack and told her to leave her house keys with the displaced Serbs living in the house so that the "exchange commission" could come and make an inventory of her property. They were then driven to the pheasant farm at Suvo Polje. There she handed over her money and documents. She signed a document stating: "I give up my property voluntarily". She estimated that there were between 50 and 60 people waiting at Suvo Polje.

Among them she saw Ekrem (aged about 70 years old) who had been beaten before being brought there. She told Amnesty International: "I said to the Serbs: 'Give this old man

pyjamas, it is shameful to be taken away in this condition'. His face was covered with bruises, his lip split, blood on his chest."

Thirteen men of military age were separated from the group and were kept back. Another five men of military age were allowed to go because they were regarded as unfit for military service. They slept at the pheasant farm that night and the next day the remaining group of about 40 people was driven back to Bijeljina in a lorry. The lorry then took them on to the Br\_ko area where they had to spend another night sleeping outside or in the lorry. Late in the afternoon on Tuesday 29 July 1994, around 40 hours after she was picked up from her home, she and the others crossed the lines at Vu\_kovi\_i. The VRS started shelling before allowing them to cross. She saw a soldier hit one person with a rifle butt for being too slow. They walked for about an hour until they reached the Bosnian Army positions. Five or six shells exploded as they walked. She did not know which side fired them.

In addition to those who were detained at Suvo Polje and other locations, more men of military age were detained after being taken from their homes. Others were taken away for "work obligations" on 4 August. The wife of one man was told that he would be returned after 10 days. In September she was told by the local "defence ministry" office that he would be exchanged. By October she had heard through a message passed via the ICRC that her husband was being detained and made to dig trenches and carry wood.

The word was spread that Muslims should pay to leave if they wanted to avoid physical expulsion. Many Muslims had by then, in desperation, taken the initiative of going to the "exchange commission" offices in Bijeljina and Janja and putting their names down for departure; some packed bags expecting to be rounded up from their homes. Others, perhaps unable to comprehend what was happening, were still surprised when their turn came. Amir from Bijeljina, for example, was picked up and expelled late at night on 6 August. At the end of July two men dressed in civilian clothes had come to his house and ordered him to go with them to the "exchange commission" office. At the office Vojislav Djuri\_i\_ took his personal details. He was told to report daily to the office which he did. He described the events of 6 August:

"They came at about 11.30pm and asked for my and my aunt's documents. They told me that I had to get out the house in five minutes ... In those five minutes I could not take anything, not even my clothes, I could not take them because he [one of the police] was there all the time."

He and others were taken by car and then van to a convoy of what he remembered as four lorries. The lorry was driven to the pheasant farm at Suvo Polje.

"It was dark. There they lined us up one behind the other and we went into a small room. There they demanded our money and other valuable items. They asked me how much money I had. I said 625 [German] Marks; he took 600 and left me 25. Then they transferred me to another room, five by three metres, where we found others already there. They were lying on the floor so that I could hardly get into the room ... We spent the night there and the next morning they loaded us into a lorry. They took off the men who were capable [of performing

military service]. Again the lorry was overcrowded. It was extremely hot but they did not allow us to lift the covers ... People were fainting, especially the women."

The next night they arrived at the front line near Šatorovići which they were made to cross on foot. Before crossing the front line a Bosnian Serb Army officer warned them to walk in single file as there were minefields either side of the road.

Acts of violence by uniformed men continued. On 15 or 16 August Husein was reportedly taken from his house in Janja by four men in camouflage uniforms whom a witness described as police. The witness named them as local men who had not been policemen before the war. Husein was taken away and returned later with bruises on his back and stomach.

According to a United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) spokesperson, 86 out of 110 people who crossed to Tuzla on 18 August had reported for departure believing that they would be taken to western European countries.<sup>9</sup> The spokesman suggested that advertisements for travel to western countries had been used as a method of enticing Muslims who had adopted Serbian names to identify themselves.

On the night of 22 August Vojislav Djurić himself took one family from their house in Bijeljina. They were taken to join others at Suvo Polje and at dawn two days later some 250 people crossed at Ban Brdo. Some had paid to leave; others had been wrested from their houses. Vojislav Djurić and other Serbs were reportedly anxious that night. A group of Serbs was expected to cross from Tuzla in exchange, but apparently did not materialize.

Muslims continued to sign and pay to leave. For some there was more direct pressure. Three armed and uniformed men claiming to be military police banged on the door of the family of Faruk in Bijeljina one evening. The occupants saw from the windows that they wore masks (they later suspected that they were neighbours) and refused to let them in. Faruk went to the local Red Cross office which allegedly advised them to pay to leave rather than be forced out. Later Faruk paid 700 German Marks for his seven-member family to be allowed to leave.

"Prices" had been established of 1,500 Marks for men of military age and 150 Marks for others, although these "prices" were often varied. Despite the payments, the "contracts" were often not honoured. Men of military age were regularly kept back at Suvo Polje or other collection points and taken into detention. Others were robbed of all but small amounts of their remaining money and valuables before they were allowed to cross. On 24 August, the day they left Bijeljina, Faruk's family were made to strip to their underwear at Suvo Polje and more than 1,500 Marks was taken from them. Even very young children were searched. Other people reported strip searches although this appeared not to be the usual practice.

More people who had "signed up" to leave continued to cross the lines regularly throughout August. Men of military age continued to be taken away into detention. As if to

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<sup>9</sup> Reuters news agency, 19 August 1994.

keep up the pressure, another group was forcibly taken from their homes in Janja on the night of 2 September 1994. The next week more people were pressured into signing up to leave. "Vojkan's men" visited more Muslim houses to make inventories of possessions, encouraging people to leave. One Muslim man from Bijeljina who went to the "exchange commission" office after such a visit reported being told there, "You are going to be exchanged. Be careful what you say because your family is here in Bijeljina as hostages. Are you going of your own free will or did someone expel you?". The Muslim man stated further: "I had to say it was of my own free will ... I decided to leave because there had been 20 Muslim families in my street and ours was the only one left."

With or without the encouragement of the "commission", displaced Serbs used its existence to help them take over property. One man told Amnesty International:

"One Serb refugee family came to my house on 3 September. They did not come with the authorities ... They had weapons, but they did not threaten me with them. They said: 'You must sign at Vojkan's office if you want to stay alive'. We realised it was better to go than stay and be killed."

A vehicle stolen from the ICRC office in Bijeljina was also reportedly driven around Janja by Serbs purporting to be ICRC staff who tried to convince Muslims that they should leave.<sup>10</sup>

Between 18 September and 19 September around 2,500 people crossed the front lines. These appear to have been people who had signed up to leave. One man who crossed that night stated that a soldier held a knife to his wife's chest and forced her to hand over the last of their money just before they crossed the lines. Men of military age were again taken away that night. According to the ICRC, one man died after stepping on a mine while crossing and another died from exhaustion.<sup>11</sup>

By then as many as 600 men had been taken into detention and only a few released. Most had paid to leave, but were nevertheless separated from the others. Some families have established that their relatives are in detention through messages passed on by the ICRC. However, many relatives still in Janja or Bijeljina could not get an admission from any of the authorities that their menfolk were being held. Only after several weeks of persistent pressure did some relatives get acknowledgement of detention. Displaced Muslims in Tuzla gave Amnesty International the names of 270 men who are detained or appear to have "disappeared". They are probably detained in places around the villages of Lopare (at least three locations), Jablanica, Piperi and Greda. The ICRC did not have access to all those detained or all suspected places of detention. It reported that it had been granted access to

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<sup>10</sup> Reuters news agency, 8 September 1994, quoting an ICRC spokesperson.

<sup>11</sup> Reuters news agency, 19 September 1994.

220 detained Muslims, but it believed the total number detained in the Lopare area was much higher.<sup>12</sup>

By 19 September, a total of around 6,000 Muslims had departed in 14 different operations. It is not certain how many Muslims remain in the area. However, the number of men in detention and the number of people who reported that they still had relatives remaining indicated that they number several hundred at the least.

On 22 September the central *de facto* Bosnian Serb authorities announced that permission would no longer be granted for people to "emigrate to Muslim-controlled" territory (see below). This did not completely halt the exodus of Muslims, although the numbers dropped significantly. For example, 16 Muslims were reportedly taken from their homes in Bijeljina and expelled around 27 October and 19 were expelled from Bijeljina on 8 November together with two people from Janja. There have been reports that more of the remaining Muslims in Bijeljina are being made to perform forced labour. There are also fresh reports of Muslim men being killed while digging trenches for the VRS in this area. According to *The Independent* (London) of 14 November the Humanitarian Law Fund reported that several Muslim men had been killed the previous week.

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<sup>12</sup> ICRC Communication to the Press, 20 September 1994.

## **Amnesty International's conclusions**

The events in Bijeljina and Janja reveal a systematic plan to expel the remaining Muslims and extort money and property from them. Since July hundreds of people have been rounded up in their homes late at night, given a few minutes to pack and then taken to the front line where they have been made to cross the front line into Bosnian Government-controlled territory. Prominent members of the Muslim community were reportedly a particular target for expulsion. Men of military age have been taken into detention and some may have been "disappeared". The men are clearly civilians and Amnesty International considers them to be prisoners of conscience, detained solely because of their nationality, ethnicity or religion. Some of the detained men or their relatives were told that they were to perform "work obligations", these include working close to front lines where they may have been used as "human shields".

Threats or acts of violence against Muslims (including beatings of people in their homes, in police stations or in detention camps) which were perpetrated by uniformed men, reinforced the pressure on the remaining Muslims. Word was also spread that Muslims could leave in a supposedly orderly manner in exchange for payment. The abuses were designed to send a clear message to the remaining Muslims, that if they did not pay they would risk being rounded up in the middle of the night and summarily expelled or, in the case of men of military age, taken into detention (and possibly subsequent expulsion).

Thousands of Muslims consequently registered to depart and paid large sums of money. In light of the pattern of intimidation and pressure directed against the Muslim community over the preceding months and during the wave of expulsions by the *de facto* Bosnian Serb authorities and paramilitaries, the decision of thousands to leave could hardly be considered voluntary.

Moreover, those who paid to leave, along with those who were forcibly expelled, were subject to humiliation, threats and sometimes physical ill-treatment. In particular, they were frequently robbed of most of their remaining money and valuables before they crossed the front lines. Even worse, despite having paid large sums to leave, many men of military age were nevertheless taken away and detained.

Without doubt the expulsions and most of the abuses associated with them have been organized by the "Commission for the Exchange of Populations", in conjunction with the "Mauzer guards" or "Vojkan's men" in Bijeljina. It is clear that this "exchange commission" and those serving it, whatever their status with the *de facto* authorities, have enjoyed the cooperation of elements of the Bosnian Serb army, particularly in gaining access to the front lines in order to force or allow Muslims to cross.

No serious action to prevent the abuses appears to have been taken by the central Bosnian Serb authorities until late August or early September when the Chief of Police in Bijeljina was reportedly removed. According to the Bosnian Serb representative, Radovan Karadžić, the Bijeljina police chief was removed *"because he failed to prevent certain groups*

that were humiliating and abusing the Muslim population"<sup>13</sup>. Radovan Karad\_i\_ also reportedly said: "We have already arrested two small independent groups that have been intimidating Muslims. I do expect results soon". Ten days later, around 18 September, 2,500 Muslims left Bijeljina. The number of expulsions dropped dramatically after 18 September. On 22 September, apparently in response to continuing international pressure, Radovan Karad\_i\_ gave orders to the "Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Serbian Republic to immediately stop issuing citizens with permits to emigrate to Muslim-controlled territory"<sup>14</sup> A statement also said that "[t]he Ministry of Internal Affairs has been asked thoroughly to investigate the circumstances surrounding the transfer and - if there is evidence of unlawful actions - to set in motion adequate procedures".

The central authorities had the clear responsibility to prevent the expulsion and end other abuses. Amnesty International itself drew the attention of the central and local *de facto* Bosnian Serb authorities to its concerns in the area as early as February 1993 and renewed its appeals on other occasions, particularly in July 1994. At the very least the central authorities failed to act swiftly and decisively as soon as they were aware of the renewed intimidation of Muslims and when it became clear that this was being carried out in conjunction with forcible expulsions. An unknown number of Muslims remain in the area who are still at risk of expulsions and other abuses. It should also not be forgotten that expulsions of non-Serbs (or abuses aimed at forcing them to seek to leave) occurred in other areas such as Rogatica and Banja Luka in the same period.

## Amnesty International's recommendations

Amnesty International condemns the recent abuses perpetrated in these areas. It repeats its earlier appeals to the *de facto* authorities to respect the commitments they made at the London Conference in August 1992 and repeatedly since then.<sup>15</sup> The organization makes special reference to the reported orders given by Radovan Karad\_i\_ on 22 September ordering investigations into the expulsions and his statement of 8 September regarding the arrest of some groups suspected of intimidating Muslims. The organization calls upon *de facto* Bosnian Serb authorities to:

<sup>13</sup> *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, Central Europe, the Balkans*, EE/2097, 10 September 1994. Radovan Karad\_i\_ is quoted by the Belgrade-based *Tanjug* news agency.

<sup>14</sup> *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, Central Europe, the Balkans*, EE/2109, 24 September 1994, quoting a report from the *Tanjug* news agency.

<sup>15</sup> At the London Conference on the former Yugoslavia on 27 August 1992. The Bosnian Serb representative, Radovan Karad\_i\_, along with representatives of other parties, signed a Program of Action on Humanitarian Issues. They committed themselves to respect human rights and humanitarian law standards, to exercise control over "undisciplined elements" and end "all practices involving forcible displacement, all forms of harassment, humiliation ... and all acts involved in the practice of ethnic cleansing."

- ◆ give an immediate statement outlining the progress of the investigations into the expulsions and those suspected of intimidating Muslims around Bijeljina who were reportedly arrested before 8 September;
- ◆ make public the methods and terms of reference of the inquiries;
- ◆ ensure that, regardless of the progress of the inquiries, all those suspected of perpetrating human rights abuses are immediately withdrawn from any position of public or military office.

Regardless of the progress and outcome of the investigations, the *de facto* authorities should also:

- ◆ release from detention all civilians detained in northeast Bosnia-Herzegovina solely on account of their nationality;
- ◆ ensure that all those suspected of perpetrating human rights abuses are brought to justice;
- ◆ announce what further action will be taken to prevent the recurrence of such abuses;
- ◆ strengthen chains of command and exercise strict control over all forces including paramilitary ones;
- ◆ cooperate with existing or future international human rights monitors, allowing them unimpeded access to Bosnian Serb-controlled territories.

Amnesty International also calls on governments of United Nations (UN) member-states to find ways to put pressure on the Bosnian Serbs to stop the abuses. Despite the expulsion of tens of thousands of people, thousands of Muslims and Croats remain in Bosnian Serb-controlled areas and continue to be at risk of arbitrary detention, torture, extra-judicial execution and forcible expulsion.

If there is a peace deal in Bosnia, governments of UN member-states must ensure that it contains strong human rights guarantees and mechanisms to ensure they are implemented, including a civilian human rights monitoring operation throughout Serb-dominated areas and elsewhere in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The draft Owen-Stoltenberg peace agreement contains some important human rights guarantees and mechanisms. Governments (particularly the so-called Contact Group) must not abandon these in a desperate attempt to secure the signature of the Bosnian Serbs.