

AI Index: PRE01/210/2011  
15 April 2011

## **Croatia: Key international court ruling delivers justice to victims of war crimes**

A judgement handed down today by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) convicting two Croatian generals of responsibility for crimes against humanity is a strong victory for Croatia's war victims, Amnesty International said.

The ICTY convicted Ante Gotovina and sentenced him to 24 years. Mladen Markač was also convicted and sentenced to 18 years' imprisonment. A third general, Ivan Čermak, was acquitted.

Ante Gotovina and Mladen Markač were found guilty of having participated in a joint criminal enterprise during and after the military "Operation Storm," carried out from August to November 1995 with the aim of forcibly and permanently removing the ethnic Serb population from the Krajina region of Croatia.

"This judgement is the first step to truth and justice for many victims of crimes committed during 'Operation Storm' in Croatia in 1995," said Nicola Duckworth, director of Amnesty International's Europe and Central Asia Programme.

"It shows that even the most high-level perpetrators of crimes under international law cannot evade justice."

According to the indictment, crimes against humanity were committed during the 1995 military operation, including persecutions, deportation, murder and inhumane acts. The charges also included war crimes, such as unlawful destruction of civilian property.

In a recent report, *Behind a Wall of Silence: prosecution of war crimes in Croatia*, Amnesty International documented how justice in Croatia is slow and selective more than 15 years after the war ended, and how a lack of political will to deal with the wartime past prevents many victims from receiving justice, discovering the truth and obtaining reparation.

Only 18 cases are resolved on average each year, adding to a backlog of more than 500 cases. At the current rate of prosecution, some victims of alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity would need to wait another 30 years to see justice.

High-level Croatian political figures – including current Deputy Speaker of the Croatian Parliament Vladimir Seks – have yet to face investigation. Prosecutions target mostly Croatian Serbs and other minorities whereas crimes committed by the Croatian Army and police forces go unpunished.

Local courts lack witness support and protection measures. The well-known case of the August 2000 killing of Milan Levar, a potential ICTY witness remains unresolved.

"The international community must demand that Croatia investigates and prosecutes its backlog of

hundreds of cases to give victims access to justice, truth and reparation,” said Nicola Duckworth.

“Justice must be sought – and delivered – for Croatia’s war victims.”

Only a very limited number of low-level perpetrators have been brought to justice in Croatia for crimes committed during Operation Storm.