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Bosnia and Herzegovina: Anniversary of Srebrenica genocide a cruel reminder of the need to tackle impunity and provide reparation

On the 19th anniversary of the killing of more than 8,000 Bosniaks (Bosnian Muslims) from Srebrenica in July 1995, Amnesty International calls on the authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) – including in both the Federation of BiH and Republika Srpska – to urgently step up efforts to deal with the persisting backlog of unresolved cases of crimes under international law, arising from the armed conflict of the 1990s. The organization also calls on the authorities to guarantee victims of these crimes access to truth, justice and reparation.

On 10 July 1995, Bosnian Serb forces advanced into the Srebrenica enclave, a designated UN "safe area", where thousands of Bosniaks had taken refuge. Srebrenica fell to Bosnian Serb forces, and despite the presence of the United Nations Protection Force, more than 8,000 Bosniak men and boys were separated from the rest of the population and summarily executed during the days that followed. The International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY), in 2004, established that the Bosnian Serb forces carried out genocide against the Bosnian Muslims.¹

Proceedings still continue at the ICTY against former Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadžić and former General Ratko Mladić, both indicted by the ICTY for genocide, crimes against humanity and violation of the laws or customs of war, including at Srebrenica.

Remembrance is made harder, as the authorities in BiH continuously fail to fulfil their obligations towards the families of those killed in Srebrenica and elsewhere, as well as the victims of other enforced disappearances during the armed conflict in BiH. Relatives of the victims are still waiting for justice, truth and reparation, while the majority of those responsible enjoy impunity.

The bodies of more than six thousand victims of the Srebrenica genocide have been exhumed, identified and buried at the memorial in their name. The identification of about one thousand mortal remains is ongoing, and an estimated one thousand are still missing. The Law on Missing Persons has never been fully implemented, leaving the families of the missing with no access to reparation, including restitution, compensation, rehabilitation, satisfaction and guarantees of non-repetition.

On this anniversary, Amnesty International calls on the authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina to undertake urgent steps to ensure the right to truth, justice and reparation for the victims and their families. The organization stresses that expressions of clear commitment to implement existing measures to end impunity for crimes under international law, including enforced disappearances, are crucial. Prompt, independent, effective and impartial investigations of crimes under international law should be carried out, and efforts to prosecute these cases should be stepped up. Finally, the gravity of the crimes should be adequately reflected in the sentencing. Almost two decades after Srebrenica, independent, impartial and effective procedures for relatives to receive reparation in accordance with international standards must be finally put in place.

¹ See *Prosecutor v. Radislav Krstić*, 19 April 2004, para. 35. <http://www.icty.org/x/cases/krstic/acjug/en/krs-aj040419e.pdf>