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Bosnia and Herzegovina: Ten years on and no justice for the victims of Srebrenica

On the eve of the tenth anniversary of the massacre of around 8,000 Bosniak (Bosnian Muslim) men and boys in Srebrenica, Amnesty International members around the world are calling for the perpetrators to be brought to justice.

On 10 July 1995, the Bosnian Serb forces advanced on the Srebrenica enclave, which was a designated UN "safe area", and where thousands of Bosniaks had taken refuge. After Srebrenica fell to Bosnian Serb forces, thousands of Bosniak men and boys were separated from the rest of the population and deliberately and arbitrarily killed. The wide-scale, organized and systematic killing of thousands of people in Srebrenica has been described as the biggest atrocity in Europe since the end of the Second World War and has been recognized by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (Tribunal) as an act of genocide.

The vast number of unresolved cases of "disappearances" in which the perpetrators have not yet been brought to justice is perhaps the most serious ongoing human rights violation in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

"Ten years after the end of war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the women of Srebrenica are still waiting for the men who killed their sons and husbands to be brought to justice. Many of them are still waiting for the bodies of their loved ones to be returned for burial and their suffering to be recognized," Nicola Duckworth, Programme Director of Europe and Central Asia at Amnesty International, said.

Although some perpetrators have been prosecuted by the Tribunal and although a number of indictees have voluntarily surrendered in recent months, 10 indicted suspects including former Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic and former Bosnian Serb generals Ratko Mladic and Zdravko Tolimir are still free and believed to be in Republika Srpska, Bosnia and Herzegovina, or in Serbia.

"So far not a single person indicted by the Tribunal has been arrested by the Republika Srpska authorities. Some of the suspects at large are believed to enjoy their protection. The lack of cooperation with the Tribunal by the Bosnian Serb authorities continues to be a major obstacle to justice," Nicola Duckworth said.

In January 2004, the Republika Srpska authorities established the "Srebrenica Commission"

tasked with investigating events at Srebrenica and which, in June and October 2004, issued reports acknowledging participation of Bosnian Serb police and armed forces in the Srebrenica massacre. In November 2004, the Republika Srpska authorities for the first time apologized for the gross human rights violations at Srebrenica. At the end of March 2005, they forwarded to the State Prosecutor of Bosnia and Herzegovina a list of 892 people suspected of involvement in the atrocities at Srebrenica and who are still reportedly employed in Republika Srpska or Bosnia and Herzegovina institutions.

Amnesty International welcomes these first positive steps, and strongly urges the Republika Srpska authorities to take immediate steps to ensure that Ratko Mladic, Radovan Karadzic, Zdravko Tolimir and all other indicted suspects are arrested and transferred to the custody of the Tribunal. Moreover, the organization urges the Republika Srpska authorities to ensure full cooperation with any criminal investigations that may be opened into the events at Srebrenica in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Amnesty International calls on the Republika Srpska authorities to make immediately available to the relatives of the "disappeared" in Srebrenica all information on the fate and whereabouts of their loved ones.

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