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Bosnia-Herzegovina: Ahmi_i verdict - Justice needs to go further

Today's convictions in The Hague of five Bosnian Croats for one of the largest atrocities concerning Bosnian Croats and Bosniacs carried out in the armed conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina is a welcome step toward justice, Amnesty International said. However, as stated by the presiding judge, those carrying the main responsibility for ordering and carrying out the killings have largely managed to escape justice.

Five Bosnian Croat men were convicted of war crimes by the International Criminal Tribunal for former Yugoslavia in The Hague in what the presiding judge said was "one of the most vicious illustrations of man's inhumanity to man". The men received sentences ranging from six to 25 years' imprisonment. A sixth defendant was acquitted.

The men had been involved in the killing of over 100 Bosniacs (Bosnian Muslims), including over 33 women and children in Ahmi_i village in central Bosnia-Herzegovina. The Tribunal concluded that the attack had not been part of a combat operation but was an organized killing of civilians.

Amnesty International renews its calls to all United Nations member states, including Croatia and the Republika Srpska (the Bosnian Serb entity), to provide the Tribunal with their unconditional cooperation to ensure that full justice is achieved for victims of war crimes.

It is clear that the Tribunal will not be able to carry out investigations and prosecutions in all cases of war crimes committed in Bosnia-Herzegovina. In this respect Amnesty International believes it to be of crucial importance that national courts in Bosnia-Herzegovina will prosecute those thought to be responsible for such crimes in trials that meet international standards of fairness.

Amnesty International notes that the Ahmi_i trial represents only the second full prosecution of all suspects jointly charged in one indictment. However, other prosecutions where not all jointly indicted suspects came into the Tribunal's custody at the same time, if at all, have resulted in great increases in costs and length of proceedings. Amnesty International continues to urge states contributing troops to Stabilization Forces (SFOR) in Bosnia-Herzegovina to seek out and arrest indictees in order for the Tribunal to be more effective.
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