

0900 hrs gmt Thursday 21 January 1993

**EBOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA-**

**@RAPE AND OTHER HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS STILL GOING ON**

Women in Bosnia-Herzegovina have been singled out for horrifying violations - rape and sexual abuse - at the hands of armed forces, Amnesty International confirmed today.

"The sexual abuse has been widespread and sometimes systematic," said the human rights organization, in one of two reports on Bosnia-Herzegovina they launched today. "It seems to fit into the pattern of ethnic repression which has tragically characterized the war, and women have sometimes been taken captive by soldiers specifically to be raped."

In its report, the organization cites cases where women have been raped in houses by soldiers from the town or passing through, where women have been raped while held in detention centres and cases where women have been detained in hotels and other buildings specifically so that they could be raped by soldiers. Forces from all sides in the conflict have become rapists, and women from all backgrounds have been victims, although Muslim women have been chief victims, at the hands of Serbian armed forces.

In one such case, a 17-year-old Muslim girl told a doctor that Serbs took her and other women from her village to huts in woods nearby. She was held there for three months, along with 23 other women - although she believes she saw around 100 women in total being unloaded. She was among 12 women who were raped repeatedly in the hut in front of the other women - when other women tried to defend her they were beaten by the soldiers.

While it is open to question whether rape has been explicitly selected by military leaders as a weapon of war, it is clear that local officers must have known about the abuses - and condoned them. And that level of indifference is all too blatant across a frightening range of human rights abuses in Bosnia-Herzegovina, particularly as rape and other abuses can amount to a grave breach of the Geneva Conventions.

In the second document by Amnesty International, the organization reveals an insider's view of atrocities which happened in one town in Bosnia-Herzegovina between April and November 1992. The daily diary of intimidation, woundings, imprisonment, arrests and killings is made more compelling still by the realization that these horrors were occurring even as the world was scrutinizing - and fiercely condemning - such violations, under the spotlight of the media.

The atrocities are illustrated in a diary written by a Muslim man in the town of Bosanski Petrovac, and documents the descent of the town from tension to terror. From initial reports of Muslims losing their jobs, the situation in the town deteriorated and the document relates how Serbian soldiers began firing into Muslim homes, how men were imprisoned, homes burned, civilians killed and eventually thousands were left with no option but to flee, fearing for their lives.

The diary's writer describes the fear in which the Muslims lived. "The coming night is uncertain," he wrote; "one awaits it with fear and trepidation. The Muslims are utterly terrified, conscious that they are surrounded and left to the mercy of those whom no one can pacify...The time is ideal for murder, plunder, ill-treatment, rape and arson."

All this was going on even as the world was first learning of violations elsewhere in Bosnia-Herzegovina. "People in countries around the world were being sickened by the horrors of detention camps in Bosnia-Herzegovina, but the armed forces themselves continued to violate human rights," said Amnesty International. "We fear that even now, as peace is being negotiated, violations may spread as a result of hostilities between Bosnian Croatian and Bosnian Government forces."

But while the forces and their leaders may not seem to care, hundreds of thousands of other people from around the world care passionately. When Amnesty International asked people to write in protesting about the violations in the former Yugoslavia, they did so in massive numbers - almost half a million, from scores of different countries and every region of the world.

"Everyone who is involved - the leaders of all sides, those involved in the peace talks and all the international community - should realise that human rights are a crucial part of the future of the region and their violation is a massive blackspot in its present. Hundreds of thousands of ordinary people care enough to write to the delegates - does anyone in authority care enough to stop the human rights violations?"

**EMBARGOED FOR 0900 HRS GMT THURSDAY 21 JANUARY 1993**