

15 February 1996

BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA
HIDAJET DELI_: PRISONER OF CONSCIENCE

Hidajet Deli_, a Bosnian Muslim photojournalist, was arbitrarily detained by the Bosnian Serb authorities on 8 February 1995. Amnesty International believes that he has been detained solely on account of his nationality. The organization thus considers him a prisoner of conscience and demands his immediate and unconditional release.

Hidajet Deli_ is employed by the Bosnian state press agency BH Press, and also works periodically for the Associated Press (AP). He and Sr_an Ili_, a photographer employed by AP in Belgrade, were on assignment to an area of Sarajevo which is under the control of the Bosnian Serb authorities on 8 February 1996 when their vehicle was stopped approximately 15 metres from a checkpoint maintained by the Bosnian Serb "border police". They examined the two journalists' documents, from which it was apparent that Hidajet Deli_ is Muslim, and one officer reportedly said "This is the type we need", implying that they were being detained as hostages, and took the two men into the shelter at the checkpoint. The two men were initially separated, but then were later reunited at the police station in Grbavica. They were interrogated there by military police, and then transferred to Pale, where they were again interrogated by the military authorities and held in a makeshift detention centre overnight. On the afternoon of 9 February, Sr_an Ili_ was interrogated by civilian authorities and released from detention.

Dragan Kijac, the interior minister of the Republika Srpska (the Serbian entity in Bosnia-Herzegovina created under the General Framework Peace Agreements for Bosnia-Herzegovina), has informed the UN Civilian police monitors of the International Police Task Force (IPTF) that the photojournalist was under investigation on the suspicion of having been engaged in "espionage," and also having committed crimes against the Serbian civilian population in Sarajevo between 1992 and 1996.

International organizations have reportedly not been allowed access to Hidajet Deli_, nor has he been permitted contact with his family or colleagues. It is not known where he is now being held or if he is in the custody of civilian or military authorities, or if he has been granted access to a lawyer (Sr_an Ili_ was not granted access to a lawyer during the time of his detention). Hidajet Deli_ was exempt from military service for the Bosnian Army on medical grounds.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Framework Agreements oblige all parties to ensure complete freedom of movement throughout Bosnia-Herzegovina, yet all sides have maintained checkpoints and have interrogated and detained individuals. It is not known how many such detainees remain in custody. The detention of Sr_an Ili_ and Hidajet Deli_ seems to have been in retaliation for the arrest of two senior Bosnian Serb army officers by Bosnian Federation authorities. On 30 January 1995, a

number of Bosnian Serb army soldiers were apprehended in Sarajevo on suspicion of committing war crimes. Two of them, General Đorđe Đukić and Colonel Aleksa Krsmanović, have been surrendered by the Bosnian authorities to the International Criminal Tribunal on former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and are now detained in its facilities in the Hague, the Netherlands.

The Bosnian Serb authorities protested strongly to the action on the basis that the men had been on their way to a meeting with the multinational Peace Implementation Force (IFOR) when they were apprehended. General Ratko Mladić, the commander of the Bosnian Serb armed forces, severed communication with the Bosnian Federation on 7 February and with IFOR on 8 February because of the incident. However, other members of the Bosnian Serb leadership have continued to cooperate with IFOR. The Bosnian Serb Minister of Justice, Marko Arsović, however, reportedly announced on 8 February that he would be compelled to call on "[prosecuting] bodies" to act in the same way towards citizens of the Bosnia-Herzegovina Federation who crossed over into Bosnian Serb territory, and that they would seize Muslims or Croats crossing into their territory unless the Bosnian Serb army officers were freed.

Other journalists have been detained in the past by the Bosnian Serb *de facto* authorities for apparently arbitrary reasons. In November 1995, Amnesty International called for the immediate and unconditional release of US journalist David Rohde, whose reports about human rights abuses in the Srebrenica area may have been the reason for his detention (see UA "Arbitrary Detention: David Rohde, journalist, US National," AI Index EUR 63/26/95). In April 1995 a Swiss woman journalist of Bosnian origin, Marija Wernle-Matić, and a Swiss writer, Simon Gerber, who were visiting Sarajevo as part of a cultural delegation were detained in the Bosnian Serb-controlled part of Sarajevo for one month until they were released against a "bail" payment. They were reportedly charged with "spreading anti-Serbian propaganda" on the basis of written material allegedly found on them. A Bosnian Muslim journalist, Namik Berberović, was also detained for two months from January for similar reasons.

More recently, in October 1995 two Turkish journalists, Munire Acim and Ali Koçak, were detained in Sarajevo. They may have been taken as hostages to be exchanged for a Bosnian Serb journalist, Saša Kolečki and his driver, Goran Pejčinović, who were detained by Bosnian Government forces in September. The two Bosnian Serb men were killed in detention. Their bodies were exchanged for those of the Turkish journalists.

Up to 75 journalists or media personnel have been killed in the former Yugoslavia since 1991. Some of them were deliberately killed.