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Bosnia-Herzegovina

Dragan Mitrović: Whereabouts Unknown

Amnesty International is concerned about Dragan Mitrović (born 1975), a soldier serving with the Bosnian Serb Army (BSA) who went "missing" after his capture by Bosnian Croatian armed forces (HVO) near Jajce, Bosnia-Herzegovina on 16 September 1995.

Dragan Mitrović was drafted into the BSA at the age of 19 when he finished secondary school. On 16 September 1995, his unit was captured during a Bosnian Government military offensive near Jajce. On 17 September a short reportage produced by Croatian television was filmed about the capture of the area which briefly showed some of the BSA soldiers who had been captured by the Vareš unit (*Vareška jedinica*) of the HVO, including Dragan Mitrović. Despite his appearance in the videotape, the Bosnian Government and *de facto* Bosnian Croat authorities have provided no information about the whereabouts of Dragan Mitrović.

Some other members of his unit, including the commander, were released in prisoner exchanges in early 1996. The commander of his unit has reportedly said that he and some of the other prisoners had been held briefly in Livno and were then transferred to Mostar.¹ The commander has not answered Dragan Mitrović's family's requests to be informed whether Dragan Mitrović was one of the other prisoners.

Dragan Mitrović's parents also placed an advertisement in a Republika Srpska newspaper calling for other soldiers who had been released at that time to come forward with any news of Dragan Mitrović. They received an anonymous phone call from a man who claimed to have been held in a prison he called "Lipovica", which he said was near Mostar.² He reportedly said that Dragan Mitrović had been held together with him and was one of 15 people who remained in detention when this man was released at the end of February 1996.

Dragan Mitrović's parents also received information from another released prisoner, who also appeared among the captured Bosnian Serb soldiers filmed by the Croatian television-crew, who

¹Both Livno and Mostar are in Herzegovina, southwest Bosnia-Herzegovina.

²Amnesty International has not been able to confirm any details of this alleged place of detention.

claimed he had been imprisoned in Mostar (but in a different prison than that mentioned by the anonymous caller). This man told Dragan Mitrović's parents that in March 1996, shortly before he was released, he heard Dragan Mitrović's name and that of four other men called out, although he did not see Dragan Mitrović personally.

Background Information

NATO responded to a shelling which killed 37 civilians in Sarajevo on 28 August 1995 with military strikes on Bosnian Serb military and communication targets. Allied Croatian and Bosnian Government military forces took advantage of the Bosnian Serb disarray to launch their own offensive, which captured sizeable areas in the western areas of northwest Bosnia, including the cities of Donji Vakuf, Drvar, Jajce, and Ključ. Struggle for control of the area's key cities, including Mrkonjić Grad, Sanski Most, and Ključ continued until a cease-fire was negotiated on 5 October, which went into effect on 12 October.

International diplomatic activity during the cease-fire resulted in a peace agreement. The Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina which was initialled in Dayton in November 1995 (the Peace Agreement) included many obligations on the parties, including the release of all prisoners of war and arbitrarily detained civilians. The release of prisoners referred to those held in the conflict between the Bosnian Serb forces on one side and the mainly Muslim Bosnian Government forces and Bosnian Croat forces on the other, without conditions of reciprocal release by the other side. These releases were due to have been completed in January 1996, but were subject to delays because of problems caused by all sides.

Dragan Mitrović's military service was due to end several days after he was captured, and he had registered to enroll in a program for foreign trade at the Bijeljina university. He is an only child, and his mother describes him as an intelligent and well-behaved young man, who trains in karate and likes to listen to music. The first birthday that his parents spent without him his mother organized a birthday party for his friends and girlfriend. She reports that she did not have the strength to do the same in 1996.