

AI INDEX: EUR 63/14/98
15 DECEMBER 1998

PUBLIC STATEMENT

Bosnia-Herzegovina

Retrial of "Zvornik Seven" repeats serious procedural violations of fair trial standards

On 12 December the Bijeljina District Court, in the Bosnian Serb entity, sentenced four Bosniac (Bosnian Muslim) men to up to 20 years' imprisonment for the murder of four Bosnian Serbs in 1996.

The four men, one of whom was tried *in absentia*, had been previously tried and convicted by the Zvornik District Court in 1997, in a trial which Amnesty International had denounced as grossly unfair. After intense international pressure, the Bijeljina District Court annulled the previous verdict and called for a new trial which started in May 1998.

Amnesty International shares the concern expressed by international organizations monitoring the retrial that the evidence presented in court was insufficient to convict the defendants of the murders.

The convictions seem to have been based almost solely on self-incriminating statements signed by the defendants after they had been tortured or ill-treated by Zvornik police in the original investigative procedures. This constitutes a serious violation of international fair trial standards.

Little other evidence was produced to sustain the murder charges. Only partial remains of the bodies of two of the murdered Bosnian Serbs were found. The other two remain missing. The court reportedly refused to obtain blood samples from the remains to be analyzed and matched with blood stains found on the clothes of some of the defendants, thus failing to provide forensic evidence linking the Bosniac men to the crime.

Amnesty International urges the authorities to investigate thoroughly the reports of torture or ill-treatment of the defendants in police custody and to bring to justice anyone found responsible of human rights violations.

For further information on the original trial, see Amnesty International's press release AI Index: EUR 63/07/97, 24 April 1997.

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