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Bosnia-Herzegovina – There is less than a year left: Arrest Now!

In a year from now, military officials, political leaders and others responsible for crimes against humanity in Bosnia-Herzegovina could be free to resume their war-time positions without ever having faced justice, Amnesty International said today as it launched *Arrest Now!* a joint action with other non-governmental organizations.

“Thousands remain ‘missing’, probably the victims of mass execution, following the Bosnian Serb capture of the ‘safe area’ of Srebrenica, on 11 July 1995,” Amnesty International said on the second anniversary of the capture of Srebrenica.

“The fact that those directly responsible for organizing and planning this and other massacres are still at large puts the whole international community to shame.”

And time is fast running out. In June 1998, 11 months from now, the mandate of the multinational Stabilization Force (SFOR) for Bosnia-Herzegovina will terminate. Meanwhile, the tool created by the international community to ensure that those responsible for genocide, other crimes against humanity, and serious violations of humanitarian law in former Yugoslavia would be brought to justice is being flouted before our very eyes.

Seventy-five people are known to have been indicted for these crimes in former Yugoslavia, of which only 10 have been taken into the custody of the International Criminal Tribunal in The Hague, most recently Slavko Dokmanović, arrested on 27 June in Croatia by the UN Transitional Administration for Eastern Slavonia. “His detention proves that arrests can be made when the international community has the will to do so,” Amnesty International stated.

Most of those still at large are in Bosnia-Herzegovina, with 51 of them thought to be in the Republika Srpska, which has brazenly refused to cooperate with the Tribunal, and reportedly employs at least 10 of those indicted in its police forces.

“While they remain free to carry out those activities, national reconciliation is being seriously jeopardised and the entire peace process in Bosnia-Herzegovina risks unravelling again into a repetition of the atrocities that shocked the world,” Amnesty International said.

Since the signing of the 1995 peace agreement, Amnesty International has repeatedly stated that all states participating in SFOR are obliged, as members of the United Nations and under Security Council Resolutions, to give effect to the international arrest warrants and any others received from the Tribunal. Moreover, as parties of the Geneva Conventions, each SFOR state is obliged to search for persons alleged to have committed, or to have ordered to be committed, such grave breaches, and shall bring such persons, regardless of their nationality, before its own courts, the courts of another state, or an international criminal court.

“However, in clear breach of their obligations under international law, the NATO-led troops have pursued a policy of avoidance, going out of their way to dodge any ‘encounters’ that

would mean they have to make an arrest, and even refusing to arrest those they have encountered,” Amnesty International said.

Simple arithmetic speaks volumes: there would have to be more than one arrest every week -- at least one every five and a half days -- to ensure that merely the current publicized indictees are in custody by the end of the SFOR mandate in June 1998.

“There is little time and all that stands in the way is the will of states contributing to SFOR,” Amnesty International said. “We are asking those states to respond with action instead of words: Arrest now!”

Action information

Arrest Now! is a joint action initiative by human rights and other organizations representing labour, women, as well as religious and ethnic groups. The opening of the action has been timed to coincide with the second anniversary of the fall of Srebrenica, and aims to put pressure on the leading NATO countries -- the USA, the UK, France and Germany -- to task SFOR to arrest the indictees. Press conferences will be taking place in London, Paris, Washington and other capitals, with prominent individuals calling for immediate action.

The following countries contribute to SFOR, by participating in or providing support to the land deployments or air components of the mission: France, the United Kingdom and the United States (which control the three SFOR land divisions in which other countries’ troops are deployed), and Albania, Belgium, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, Egypt, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Malaysia, Morocco, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Spain, Sweden, Turkey and Ukraine.
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***For further information or to arrange an interview, please contact the Amnesty International Press Office on ++44 171 413 5562/5566**