

## EXTERNAL

AI INDEX: EUR 63/23/95

### £ BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

#### @NURA BERBI\_ AND HASNA DEMIROVI\_: WHEREABOUTS UNKNOWN

Amnesty International is seriously concerned about the fates of Nura Berbi\_, age 52, and her mother Hasna Demirovi\_, age 72, ethnic Muslims from Banja Luka whose whereabouts are unknown. The two were allegedly taken from their homes on the night of 14 August 1995 by two men, one who was in military uniform. They have not been heard from since. Amnesty International fears that they may have been arbitrarily detained or subject to other human rights abuses, and is concerned for their safety.

Military advances by Croatian forces in Bosnia and Croatia in July and August resulted in the arrival of tens of thousands of displaced ethnic Serbs in the Bosnian Serb-held Banja Luka area. Many of the displaced Serbs, often armed and in military uniform, have reportedly harassed non-Serbs in trying to gain accommodation.

Out of fear for their safety, at the beginning of August the Berbi\_ family was considering leaving their home for an area where they would be safer. Nura Berbi\_'s husband did not spend the night of 14 August at his home, and when he returned to his apartment the morning of 15 August, his wife and mother-in-law were not there. Both his apartment and that of his mother-in-law were locked and did not appear to be in any disarray. A neighbour allegedly saw the two women being led away by two men on the night of 14 August, one in civilian attire and the other in uniform.

Neither Nura Berbi\_ nor Hasna Demirovi\_ has since contacted any friends or family, nor has either woman appeared on any list of those displaced from or detained in the region. The *de facto* authorities have apparently been unresponsive to requests to locate the two women.

Before the war, Nura Berbi\_ worked as an accountant in the local tobacco factory. Her husband was a successful businessman who was the director and a partial owner of a shopping centre in the centre of Banja Luka. They have an adult son and daughter, both of whom left the country before the war.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In August 1995, an extremely large number (estimates range from 100,000 to 200,000) of Bosnian and Croatian Serbs fled advancing Croatian or Bosnian troops into north-west Bosnia-Herzegovina. The columns of people, which included civilians and the military, sought shelter in areas more secure, primarily in Banja Luka, the largest city under the control of the *de facto* authorities of the self-declared *Republika Srpska*. At the time, Amnesty International expressed concern about the possibility of serious human rights abuses being perpetrated by the

newly-arrived Bosnian and Croatian Serb soldiers against the remaining minority population in the Banja Luka area as acts of retribution, or to obtain accommodation (see AI index EUR 63/17/95, UA Extra 91/95 of 8 August 1995, Fear for Safety). Representatives of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees reports that since 14 August 1995, over 20,000 people have been expelled from the Banja Luka area, approximately three-quarters of whom are ethnic Croats, the majority of the remainder ethnic Muslims.

According to interviews conducted by Amnesty International with persons fleeing at that time, the expulsions were conducted by refugees or displaced persons, often Serbs from the Grahovo or Glamo\_ areas of Bosnia-Herzegovina, who would come to their houses and order them to abandon their property and homes, often under the threat of violence. Transport into Croatian territory was organized by the *de facto* Serb authorities, who bussed the expelled people to the Sava river, which marks the northern border of Bosnia-Herzegovina with Croatia, often demanding money from them. At the border the Croatian authorities arranged for the refugees to be ferried across the river. When the expulsions began in mid-August, those coming into Croatia were almost exclusively ethnic Croats, and there was little information about the fate of ethnic Muslims in the region.

Amnesty International calls upon the *de facto* Serb authorities in Banja Luka to clarify the whereabouts of Nura Berbi\_ and Hasna Demirovi\_. It also calls upon them to investigate allegations that the women were taken away by men of whom one was wearing military uniform.