

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

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Kosovo (Serbia): A significant step on the path to justice

Amnesty International welcomes yesterday's conviction at the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia of five of the men responsible for crimes against humanity and war crimes in Kosovo in 1999.

Former Yugoslav Deputy Prime Minister Nikola Šainović, Yugoslav Army General Nebojša Pavković and Serbian police General Sreten Lukić were each sentenced to 22 years' imprisonment for crimes against humanity and war crimes.

Yugoslav Army General Vladimir Lazarević and Chief of the General Staff Dragoljub Ojdanić were found guilty of aiding and abetting the commission of a number of charges of deportation and forcible transfer of the ethnic Albanian population of Kosovo, and each of them was sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment.

The verdict has finally brought to justice five of the primary architects of the war in Kosovo, which saw thousands killed and more than a million ethnic Albanians forced to flee Kosovo in 1999.

Amnesty International is concerned that the media focus on the acquittal of former Serbian president Milan Milutinović has detracted from the significance of this verdict, which 10 years after the war has brought senior police and military figures to justice, and provided the victims and their relatives with a step on the road to redress.

The organization regrets that the court was unable to attribute direct responsibility for the 1999 transfer to Serbia in refrigerated trucks of the bodies of more than 800 ethnic Albanians killed in Kosovo. The Chamber was able to convict those involved in a joint criminal enterprise to murder ethnic Albanian civilians. However, the role of members of the Serb police and paramilitary forces who carried out the killings and senior members of those forces, who conspired to hide the evidence by transporting those bodies to Serbia and burying them in Ministry of Interior property, should be thoroughly, independently and impartially investigated and, where there is sufficient admissible evidence, those responsible should be prosecuted.

Amnesty International has an ongoing programme of research into continued impunity for the enforced disappearance of ethnic Albanians during the war, and urges the Serbian authorities to ensure that the perpetrators and those complicit in the removal of the bodies are brought to justice at the War Crimes Chamber at Belgrade District Court.

The organisation also urges the EU-led mission in Kosovo (EULEX) to cooperate with the Serbian authorities in their investigations into war crimes in Kosovo, and also to ensure that ethnic Albanian forces responsible for the abduction and murder of Serbs, Roma and members of other minority communities are also brought to justice.

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