

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Public Statement

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FRY: War crimes verdict in Montenegro - Amnesty International calls for all those responsible for Strpci abductions and murders to be brought to justice

Amnesty International called on the FRY and Republika Srpska (RS) authorities today to bring to justice all those suspected of taking part in the abduction and subsequent murder of 20 Muslim passengers from the Strpci station in 1993, following the sentencing in Montenegro of Nebojsa Ranisavljevic for his part in the abduction.

"Despite Monday's verdict, Amnesty International believes that justice will not be done until all those responsible for the abduction at Strpci are brought to justice," the organization urged.

On 9 September at Bijelo Polje court in Montenegro 37-year-old Nebojsa Ranisavljevic was sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment for "war crimes against the civilian population" for his part in the hijacking of the Belgrade-Bar train at Strpci in Bosnia-Herzegovina on 27 February 1993, and the abduction and subsequent murder of 20 civilian passengers - 19 Muslims and one ethnic Croat. During the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina Nebojsa Ranisavljevic had been a member of a Serb paramilitary organization operating in the border areas between FRY and Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Ranisavljevic was arrested in October 1996, after a witness implicated him in the kidnapping, and was found guilty yesterday of shooting and wounding one of the hostages who was trying to escape. However, Nebojsa Ranisavljevic was not found guilty of actual murder and he remains the only person arrested and charged in connection with the hi-jack and abduction - despite evidence presented in the four-year-long trial substantiating the alleged involvement of a paramilitary group in the abduction and subsequent murders.

According to evidence presented in the court, those abducted were taken by the group to the village of Preljevo near Visegrad, where they were beaten and robbed. One person was shot and wounded by Nebojsa Ranisavljevic when he tried to escape, and was then bayoneted to death by the leader of the paramilitary group, Milan Lukic. The others were subsequently shot and their bodies thrown into the nearby river Drina, so the court was told.

Amnesty International is calling for the arrest and trial of Milan Lukic and others allegedly responsible for the abductions and murders. The organization is also calling for a new investigation to be opened in order to bring to justice not only those who carried out the abduction, but also those involved in planning and sanctioning these war crimes against the civilian population.

"Documents from the state railway company presented at the trial clearly demonstrated the

complicity of former political and military authorities in planning such abductions," Amnesty International said.

Amnesty International remains extremely concerned that the FRY, Serbian and RS (Republika Srpska) governments have made so little progress in tackling impunity for war crimes committed under, and with the knowledge of the previous Milosevic government. The organization is also disturbed by reports that the trial was apparently delayed many times by obstructions by the RS police and judiciary in cooperating with the Bijelo Polje court. Amnesty International urges as a matter of priority that the FRY and RS authorities establish genuine and effective cooperation to resolve this and other cases of war crimes and crimes against humanity

Amnesty International believes that, in order to create the conditions for respect and protection of human rights in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) and the region generally, it is imperative that all those responsible for war crimes and crimes against humanity in the 1990s in connection with the armed conflicts following the break-up of former Yugoslavia, be brought to justice, and all victims of these crimes receive just reparation.

Amnesty International also considers that the suffering of the relatives of the Strpci victims, in their attempts to establish what happened to their family members, amounts to a violation of their right to freedom from torture and ill-treatment, and urges the FRY authorities to provide appropriate compensation for the relatives of the abducted.

Background

On 27 February 1993, a train traveling from Belgrade to the Montenegrin port of Bar entered a 10-kilometre section of track in Bosnia-Herzegovina, in territory controlled by the Bosnian Serbs. At Strpci station the train was stopped and boarded by armed men in uniform, some of whom were thought by witnesses to be Bosnian Serb or military police.

The men went through the train asking for identity papers, from which they could deduce the nationality of most of the passengers. They took 20 or more men off the train. Most were Muslims from Montenegro, but one was a Croat, a retired Yugoslav National Army officer.

In the previous year, on 22 October 1992, another group of Muslims was abducted - allegedly by the same paramilitary group - from a bus at Mioce - again in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Again, only one suspect has been arrested in connection with this abduction, which has yet to come to trial. Several other abductions are believed to have taken place in the Sandzak region during the same period, which also saw a systematic practice of ill-treatment by police, and attacks on life and property by paramilitary groups in an attempt to intimidate the local Bosniac population.

Both the abductions at Strpci and Mioce are believed to have been carried out by same the paramilitary unit based in Visegrad in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and lead by Milan Lukic. Milan Lukic was secretly indicted by the International Criminal Tribunal for Yugoslavia on 12 October 1998 - (the indictment was made public on 30 October 2000) - in connection with crimes in Visegrad during this period.

According to the indictment, dated 2- August 1998, in the spring of 1992, Milan Lukic had formed a group of paramilitaries which worked with local police and military units in exacting a reign of terror upon the local Muslim population. His cousin, Sredoje Lukic, and Mitar Vasiljevic are also alleged to have been members of this group, which between May 1992 and October 1994, is alleged to have committed a multitude of crimes in the Visegrad municipality including murder, torture, assault, looting and the destruction of property. Amnesty International has also taken up cases of alleged rape and "disappearance" of young Bosnian women, at the Vilina Vlas hotel in Visegrad, in which Milan Lukic was allegedly involved.

Public Document

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