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Stanković arrest: victims of war-time rape must feel safe to testify

Amnesty International welcomes the arrest of Radovan Stanković, the fugitive who escaped from Foča prison almost five years ago after having been convicted by the State Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina and sentenced to 20-years' imprisonment for crimes against humanity, including rape, enslavement and torture.

Stanković's re-capture is a significant event for victims of his crimes. At the same time, the fact that he was at large for so long serves to underline the systematic weaknesses in the efforts of the Bosnia and Herzegovina justice system to address the impunity gap.

For almost the last five years while Stanković was at large, many victims of rape and other forms of sexual violence lived in fear. His escape contributed to their re-traumatisation and discouraged many of them from testifying because of fear for their safety.

More than 16 years after the end of the conflict, many perpetrators of crimes under international law including rape and other crimes of sexual violence are still at large. Some of them even live in the same communities as their victims.

The implementation of the National Strategy for War Crimes Processing is delayed. To date, fewer than 50 cases of rape and other crimes of sexual violence have been completed by the State Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina and courts in the Entities and Brčko District.

Today, Bosnia and Herzegovina still lacks a state level detention facility that can accommodate prisoners convicted of serious offences, including war-related crimes. Radovan Stanković has reportedly been transferred to the same prison from where he escaped in 2007 with the aid and support of prison staff.

Secure prisons are essential to end impunity in Bosnia and Herzegovina and to ensure that victims have access to justice for the crimes committed against them during the war. They are also essential to ensure that the 2007 escapade is not repeated.

Background

Rape and other forms of sexual violence were widespread during the 1992-1995 war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Despite the fact that the conflict ended more than 16 years ago, successive governments have consistently failed to bring those responsible to justice.

Many perpetrators of war crimes of sexual violence continue to enjoy impunity and often live in the same communities as their victims. Survivors of those crimes suffer trauma and other psychological and physical problems. Psychological support is often not available and access to health services is limited, especially for women in remote areas of the country. Many survivors are unemployed and live in poverty and cannot afford medicines, even when these are prescribed by a doctor.

See also:

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