

BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA Returned Muslim refugees in the Velika Kladaša area

Amnesty International is concerned about reports of the ill-treatment or harassment of refugees returned from Croatia to the Velika Kladaša area in northwest Bosnia-Herzegovina. The organization fears that this ill-treatment, carried out by members of the military and police forces of Bosnia-Herzegovina, may be continuing.

Some of the refugees may have been forcibly returned to Velika Kladaša by the Croatian Government, which refused to formally grant them refugee status after they fled from Bosnia-Herzegovina in August 1995. The refugees were from the area controlled by the rebel Muslim leader Fikret Abdi\_, who had broken ties with the Bosnian Government in Sarajevo in 1993 and made a separate peace deal with the rebel Serb forces in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Fearing reprisals from the Army of Bosnia-Herzegovina (ABiH) after Bosnian Government and Croatian troops took control of the region, approximately 20,000 Muslims loyal to Fikret Abdi\_ fled into the neighbouring area of Croatia and settled in a valley around the town of Kuplensko, near Vojni\_.

Croatian and Bosnian authorities have made several agreements on the return of these people in conjunction with Fikret Abdi\_. One of the agreements established a joint police force comprised of members of law enforcement agencies of the Bosnian Federation, Croatia and Turkey. Nevertheless, humanitarian organizations and United Nations Civilian Police monitors (UNCIVPOL) have recently received numerous reports of the harassment and ill-treatment of returned refugees by members of the Bosnian interior security forces. The head of police for the region admitted to a reporter from the French newsagency *Agence France Presse* that people had been beaten, but denied that there was any pattern or that the police were able to prevent it from occurring.

Some of the most serious allegations were received by UNCIVPOL monitors operating in Velika Kladaša. Bosnian soldiers belonging to the ABiH 5th Corps surrounded one woman's house on 11 January and hurled grenades at it. UNCIVPOL received another report of a grenade being thrown through the window of a house by the director of the town's civilian defence.

Beatings have also been reported. On 5 January, six soldiers from the ABiH took two brothers from their home into a wood, where they beat and kicked them, and hit them with the butts of their rifles. The soldiers then cut the brothers' hair, which they habitually wore long. In another incident on 25 December 1995, a group of men in military uniform took part in a "joyride" driving to six different houses in Velika Kladaša where it was known that returned refugees lived and beat up the men they found there.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Amnesty International has previously raised concern about the *refoulement* of these refugees and their ill-treatment by Croatian police (see EXTRA 147/95, EUR 64/13/95, 24 November 1995).

The refugees arrived in the Kuplensko area in early August 1995 after fleeing from the Velika Kladaša area at the northwest tip of neighbouring Bosnia-Herzegovina. Velika Kladaša was previously under the control of armed forces led by the rebel Muslim leader Fikret Abdi\_, who had broken with the

government in Sarajevo in 1993 and made a separate cooperative arrangement with Serb forces in Croatia and Bosnia. As a result, many of the refugees fear that they may be persecuted by Bosnian Muslim or Croatian security forces because they or members of their families fought in Fikret Abdi\_'s forces, whether their mobilization was voluntarily or not.

The Croatian authorities initially restricted access to the refugees by international organizations. A collection centre was established in the area where the refugees had arrived. Conditions in the camp are extremely primitive, but the Croatian authorities reportedly used bureaucratic obstacles to hinder international organizations seeking to improve conditions and make it possible for refugees to survive the winter weather. These measures have apparently been used to discourage the refugees from remaining in Croatia. Former Abdi\_ soldiers are among the group, some who remain loyal to him have reportedly intimidated other refugees and still have weapons hidden in the camp.

A program of voluntary return of the refugees under the supervision of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) began several months ago, and approximately 8,000 refugees remain in the camp. Because of the threats to their security, some of those who returned to Velika Kladuša voluntarily reportedly told international organizations that they now regret doing so.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send faxes in English or German or your own language:**

- expressing concern at reports of harassment and ill-treatment of returned refugees to Velika Kladuša by members of the Bosnian armed forces and police;
- emphasizing that ill-treatment by members of the security forces is contrary to international human rights standards, and reminding them that the police and military have an obligation to maintain discipline among their ranks as well as protect civilians from such ill-treatment;
- expressing concern at reported statements of the regional chief of police in which he acknowledged that beatings had occurred but indicated that police could not or would not try to prevent it;
- calling for impartial and independent investigations into all reports of ill-treatment or harassment and for measures to ensure that suspected perpetrators are held to account for their actions.

**APPEALS TO: (FAXES ONLY)**

**(Governor of the Una-Sana Canton)**

Mirsad Velad\_i\_

Guvener Unskog-Sanskog Kantona

Biha\_, Bosnia-Herzegovina

**Faxes: +387 77 229 815 (if voice, say "telefax" and wait for the signal)**

**Salutation: Dear Mr Velad\_i\_**

**(Chief of Police for the Una-Sana Canton)**

Edhem Velad\_i\_

Šef policije Unskog-Sanskog Kantona

Biha\_

**Faxes: +387 77 520 275**

**Salutation: Dear Mr Velad\_i\_**

**COPIES TO** diplomatic representatives of Bosnia-Herzegovina accredited to your country.

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.** Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 5 March 1996.