

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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EXTRA 51/95 Forcible expulsions / Fear of hostage-taking 5 May 1995

**BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA Croats in the Bosnian-Serb controlled area of northwest
Bosnia**

Amnesty International is concerned about new reports of forcible expulsions of non-Serbs from northwest Bosnia, much of which is under the control of the Bosnian Serb armed forces and *de facto* authorities. The organization fears that there may be further forcible expulsions or other abuses against Croats in the area, and that Croats may be taken into detention for possible use as hostages in exchange for Serbs detained by Croatian armed forces.

On 4 May 1995 two groups of Croatian Roman Catholic nuns were taken by soldiers from their convents in the area of the towns of Bosanska Gradiška and Nova Topola. The soldiers responsible may have been either from the Bosnian Serb army or the army of the Croatian Serbs from the *Krajina*. They were immediately taken to the bridge at Bosanska Gradiška which links Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia and made to cross into Croatia.

The nuns were not physically ill-treated during the expulsion but had to pass through a minefield laid by the Croatian Army as they were made to cross the bridge into Croatia.

In another incident, on the night of 2 and 3 May a grenade or other explosive material was reportedly thrown into the courtyard of the Catholic Bishop's residence in Banja Luka. There were no casualties reported.

Amnesty International fears that these reports indicate that a wider pattern of pressure against Croats may be developing in northwest Bosnia, possibly as a reaction to military actions by the Croatian Government in recent days (see below).

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

On 1 May Croatian forces launched an operation to retake control of the area of Western Slavonia (part of the *Krajina*) which borders with Bosnia-Herzegovina and which has been under the control of Croatian Serbs opposed to the Croatian Government since the war in Croatia in 1991. In the course of the military action more than 5,000 Serbian refugees fled into the Bosnian Serb-controlled areas of northwest Bosnia. Tension is said to be very high in the area.

Several hundred Serb men of military age have been detained by Croatian forces in the area around Pakrac. These appear to include both prisoners of war and civilians whose status has not been determined. Some of the local Croatian Serb political leaders have also been detained.

Thousands of Muslims and Croats have been effectively forcibly expelled by Bosnian Serb forces from northwest Bosnia since 1992. Many sought to leave as a result of the atmosphere of fear created by attacks on them perpetrated by uniformed men and inadequate protection from the civil or military police. Many people were forced to perform forced labour, including being made to work on or close to frontlines. The pressure was, until recently, apparently greater on Muslims than Croats. However, in recent months there has been increased

pressure on Croats. The new circumstances may further increase this pressure.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send faxes either in English, German or French or in your own language:

- stating Amnesty International's concern about reports of new expulsions of Croats from northwest Bosnia;
- emphasizing that Amnesty International is also monitoring Serbian detainees held by the Croatian Government and will raise any concerns with the Croatian authorities;
- calling for urgent action to be taken to ensure that Croats in northwest Bosnia are given full protection in the current tense situation resulting from military actions in Croatia and are not subject to physical attacks, arbitrary detention or forcible expulsion.

APPEALS TO

1) Vitomir Popovic

Member of Bosnian Serb *de facto* authorities believed to be responsible for human rights.

Faxes: * 381 78 303 14

Salutation: Dear Mr Popovic

2) Radovan Karad_i_

representative of Bosnian Serbs

Faxes : * 381 71 783 497

Salutation: Dear Mr Karad_i_

Please note that the international telephone code is for the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (381). The code for Bosnia-Herzegovina (387) should not be used. Connections may be difficult to obtain and persistence may be necessary. If there is recorded message in German saying "no connection under this area code", please try later.

COPIES OF YOUR APPEALS TO:

diplomatic representatives of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your Section office, if sending appeals after 5 June 1995.