

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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EXTRA 47/93

Deliberate and arbitrary detention of civilians/
deliberate and arbitrary killings/fear of torture
and ill-treatment

14 May 1993

**BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA: Civilian population in Mostar and in villages in
central Bosnia-Herzegovina**

Amnesty International is concerned about reports that Bosnian Croatian forces of the Croatian Defence Council (HVO) have detained as many as 2,000 people, the great majority Muslim civilians, in the town of Mostar in territory held by Bosnian Croats in south-western Bosnia-Herzegovina.

On 9 May 1993 some 400 civilians were detained in a football stadium in the town and were later seen being driven away in some 10 buses under HVO guard to a detention camp outside the city. Earlier that day fighting between Bosnian Croatian and Bosnian Muslim forces had broken out in the town, and the HVO was said to be forcibly expelling Muslims and forcing those who remained to hang white flags outside their homes.

On 12 May United Nations (UN) officials said that Bosnian Croat forces had arrested and detained 1,346 Muslims, mainly civilians, who were being held in a military barracks and adjacent buildings a few miles outside the town. Although local Croat officials claimed they had been taken there for their safety and would be allowed to return to their homes when fighting ceased, UN monitors who visited them said they were being held against their will; they were given little food and many were sleeping on cardboard mats. Families had been split up as men were held separately from women and children. However, the detainees had reportedly not been tortured or ill-treated. The same day Bosnian and Croat forces agreed a cease-fire, the second in three days. However, since then fighting has continued in the town. On 13 May UN officials reportedly put the number of those detained at 2,000.

Earlier, on 7 and 8 May, Bosnian Croatian officials claimed that about a thousand Croats had been arrested by Bosnian Government forces in the areas of Zenica and Konjic. While it appears that the majority were captured HVO soldiers, those arrested also included civilians, among them allegedly a priest, Father Ivan Vuksic.

On 12 May UN monitors reportedly visited Konjic, northeast of Mostar, where Roman Catholic nuns and priests told them they had been harassed by Bosnian Government forces who had taken two priests away for interrogation.

Since the outbreak of fighting in mid-April 1993 between Bosnian Croatian and Bosnian Government forces seeking control over territory in central Bosnia and in Herzegovina there have been reports of severe human rights abuses by both sides. According to Croatian sources on 17 April Bosnian Government forces detained and killed 13 Croatian civilians and seven HVO soldiers who had surrendered in the village of Trusine near Konjic. It is alleged that one of those killed, Pero Krešo, surrendered after being told that unless he did so his three small daughters would be killed.

An official of the UN High Commission for Refugees reported that on 24 April Muslim irregulars had killed four civilians in the village of Miletici, 25 kilometres north-west of the central Bosnian town of Zenica. The irregulars had attacked the village, and in a brief battle one attacker and one inhabitant of the village were killed. According to villagers, the gunmen then detained four men, Stipe, Tihomir, Franje and Vlada Pavlović and killed them. The UN official, who had visited the village and seen their corpses, said the men had been cruelly tortured before being most brutally killed.

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(For information about deliberate and arbitrary killings of Muslim civilians in central Bosnia-Herzegovina, please refer to EXTRA 39/93, EUR 63/11/93 of 26 April 1993.)

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Mostar, a city of 125,000, had until the outbreak of conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1992 a mixed population dominated by Muslims and Croats in roughly equal numbers. Although HVO and Bosnian Government forces are nominal allies against Serbian forces, there has been considerable tension between them over the status of the territory controlled by the HVO. In July 1992 the area of which Mostar is the capital was proclaimed by Bosnian Croat leaders as an autonomous region called the "Croatian Community of Herceg-Bosna". The Bosnian Government has little authority in this area which has largely been assigned to the Croats in the UN-backed peace proposal, generally referred to as the Vance-Owen peace plan.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send faxes/express and airmail letters either in English, French or German or in your own language:

- expressing extreme concern about reports of grave human rights abuses, including deliberate and arbitrary killings, detentions and ill-treatment of civilians and captured combatants;
- urging both sides to abide by fundamental human rights standards and humanitarian law standards, in particular the four 1949 Geneva Conventions and Additional Protocols;
- urging both authorities to strengthen the chain of command and exercise effective control to prevent further human rights abuses occurring;
- urging both authorities to immediately and unconditionally release all civilians that have been detained solely because of their national origin or that are being held as hostages;
- stressing that no one - whether detained or not - should be tortured or subjected to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment;
- stressing that Amnesty International is concerned for victims of all nationalities and is appealing to both sides in this case;
- stating that Amnesty International believes that abuses committed by one side cannot be used as justification for acts carried out by the other.

APPEALS TO

1) Representative for the Bosnian Croats:

Mate Boban
Glavni Ured Hrvatskog Vijeća Obrane
Trg Rondo BB
88000 Mostar
Bosnia-Herzegovina (via Croatia)
Faxes : + 38 58 841 455

Salutation : Dear Mr Boban

2) Head of the Croatian Defence Council:

General Milivoj Petković

Glavni Ured Hrvatskog Vijeća Obrane
Trg Rondo BB
88000 Mostar
Bosnia-Herzegovina (via Croatia)
Faxes: + 38 58 841 455

Salutation : Dear General

3) President of the Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina:
His Excellency Dr Alija Izetbegović
Predsjednik Republike Bosne i Hercegovine
Ambasada Bosne i Hercegovine
Pantovčak 96
41000 Zagreb
Croatia
Faxes: + 38 41 441 899

Salutation : Dear President

COPIES OF YOUR APPEALS TO: Croatian and Bosnian diplomatic representatives in your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 14 June 1993.