

EXTERNAL

AI Index: EUR 63/17/95

EXTRA 91/95

Fear for safety

8 August 1995

This is a limited action. Please restrict appeals to 15 per section.

BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

Non-Serbs in Bosnian Serb-controlled area

In recent days, tens of thousands of Croatian Serb refugees (estimates range from 100,000 to 200,000) have fled into northwest Bosnia-Herzegovina in advance of the Croatian Army offensive to take control of the *Krajina* area of Croatia which has been held by Croatian Serb forces since 1991. Large numbers of Croatian Serb forces have also retreated into this area which is under the control of Bosnian Serb forces.

Amnesty International is investigating allegations of human rights abuses perpetrated by Croatian Army units during the offensive including the deliberate targeting of civilians. United Nations peacekeeping personnel and possibly captured Croatian Serb soldiers have been used as "human shields" and the Croatian authorities have announced disciplinary measures against those responsible. However, the organization also remains particularly concerned about the possibility of further serious human rights abuses being perpetrated against Croats or Muslims in the Banja Luka area as acts of retribution, or to obtain accommodation, by the newly arrived Croatian Serb soldiers.

Amnesty International fears that Croats, and also Muslims and Roma, may be subject to serious acts of intimidation or violence or other measures aimed at forcibly expelling them. Although reports of the full circumstances of their departure are incomplete as many as 700 Croats have arrived in Croatia from the Banja Luka area since the new hostilities commenced on Friday 4 August 1995. This represents a marked increase on the previous outflow.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In the past three years there have been persistent reports of human rights abuses perpetrated against Muslims and Croats in Banja Luka and other towns in the region. The abuses appear to have been perpetrated most frequently by armed men, often wearing uniforms. Despite occasional campaigns of action against perpetrators, civilian and military police have usually been unwilling to intervene or ineffective in providing protection. Houses have been shot at or had grenades thrown at them. Individuals have been beaten, shot at, knifed or raped. Victims have frequently been robbed, but the principal aim of the perpetrators appears to have been to cause them to leave. Although in the past most individuals have left through semi-official agencies which have arranged transit letters or visas and transport, often in exchange for extortionate amounts of money, victims have also been evicted from their homes and transported at gunpoint. While the authorities may not have ordered many of the individual abuses, there appeared to be, at they very least, a policy of condoning such acts.

A new wave of human rights abuses commenced after the earlier Croatian Army action against the Croatian Serb forces in May. This included reports of forcible expulsions, deliberate and arbitrary killings, ill-treatment and terrorization. Most of the acts in this wave were aimed at Croats, including Roman Catholic nuns

or clergymen. Many of the abuses appeared to have been perpetrated by Croatian Serb soldiers who were seeking both retaliation against Croats and the emptying of accommodation which could be used by Serbian refugees.

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

- appealing for urgent action to be taken to ensure that non-Serbs are protected from acts of reprisal in the current tense atmosphere following the arrival of tens of thousands of new refugees in the Banja Luka region;
- calling for strict orders to be given to soldiers, particularly newly arrived Croatian Serb soldiers, to refrain from any act of violence or intimidation against non-Serbs;
- urging that the highest level of discipline be maintained among members of armed forces and ensuring that chains of command are maintained or strengthened and that all soldiers suspected of perpetrating human rights abuses are removed from any situation where they may come into contact with non-Serb civilians or others at risk of human rights abuses;
- calling for any perpetrators of human rights abuses to be held to account;
- stressing that Amnesty International is concerned for victims of all backgrounds and is investigating alleged abuses perpetrated by Croatian Army forces in the recent offensive and is appealing to the Croatian authorities concerning these.

APPEALS TO:

1) Representative of the Bosnian Serb de facto authorities (faxes only)

Radovan Karad_i_

Pale

Bosnia-Herzegovina

Faxes : * 381 71 783 566

Salutation: Dear Dr Karad_i_

Please note that the international telephone code given 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.

2) President of the Republic of Serbia

Slobodan Miloševi_

Predsednik Republike Srbije

Andri_ev venac 1

11000 Beograd, Yugoslavia

Faxes: * 381 11 682 167

Salutation: Dear President

Although the Serbian and Yugoslav Governments have officially placed an embargo against the *de facto* Bosnian Serb authorities, recent events confirm that the Serbian President has control of, or strong influence over, the Bosnian and Croatian Serb military commanders.

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 September 1995.