

AI INDEX: EUR 63/18/95
9 AUGUST 1995

BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL IS CONCERNED ABOUT THE SAFETY OF NON-SERBS IN BOSNIAN SERB-CONTROLLED AREAS

Non-Serbs should be protected from acts of reprisal in the current tense atmosphere, Amnesty International said today as tens of thousands of new refugees arrive in the Banja Luka region.

In recent days, tens of thousands of Croatian Serb refugees 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 Serb forces since 1991.

Amnesty International is concerned about persistent reports, over the last three years, of human rights abuses against non-Serbs in Bosnian Serb-controlled territory. These abuses, which appear to be condoned by the authorities, include shootings, knife attacks, beatings and rape of non-Serbs and may be ultimately aimed at forcing them to leave the area.

The organization fears that a further, even more intense wave of such abuses may follow this latest offensive, such as the one that followed the Croatian offensive against western Slavonia in May.

Amnesty International is 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.

The organization is also urging that the highest level of discipline be maintained among members of the armed forces. The chains of command should be maintained or strengthened, and all soldiers suspected of perpetrating human rights abuses must be removed from any situation where they may come in contact with non-Serb civilians or others at risk of human rights abuses.

"We are still particularly concerned about the possibility of 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 said.

Amnesty International is concerned for victims of all backgrounds and is investigating allegations of the deliberate targeting of civilians by Croatian Army units during the offensive and has appealed to the Croatian authorities to ensure that human rights and humanitarian law are respected. However, despite the desperate humanitarian situation of the fleeing Serbian refugees, it appears so far that most are in close proximity to Croatian Serb forces.

ENDS\