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YUGOSLAVIA:

@ALL SIDES IN FIGHTING HAVE TORTURED PRISONERS,  
DELIBERATELY KILLED NON-COMBATANTS

Amnesty International said today that reports from Yugoslavia's war zones over the past four months show that all sides in the conflict have blatantly flouted international humanitarian standards that forbid the murder and torture of civilians not actively involved in the fighting and captured combatants.

The human rights organization called on all parties to stop the deliberate attacks on unarmed civilians taking no part in the fighting and spare the lives of combatants who surrender -- and abide by international standards to ensure that prisoners are treated humanely and that all non-combatants who are under their control are protected.

The organization said that among the many thousands of people killed already in the fighting are unarmed civilians who were victims of extrajudicial executions and other deliberate and arbitrary killings and combatants captured by police, military or paramilitary forces.

Information about such gross human rights abuses has often been contradictory and allegations frequently difficult to verify, but there have been a series of incidents well-documented in the media and by official sources showing clearly the deliberate killing of civilians and wounded or surrendered soldiers and the torture of prisoners.

In September more than 20 people reportedly died in the village of Cetekovac in Croatia when Serbian paramilitary shot dead five elderly women and stabbed to death a 65-year-old man. Later that month 13 federal army reservists and officers who had surrendered and laid down their weapons were shot dead by a member of a special unit of the Croatian police force of Karlovac.

More recently there have been reports that a Croatian priest and two nuns were among nine people given a military escort to carry out burials, who were turned over by federal soldiers to Serbian paramilitary who beat them up in the basement of the local police station in Titova Korenica.

In recent days there have been reports of serious abuses in Vukovar. A Serbian volunteer in the federal army told journalists that the military shot up to 80 Croatian National Guards, some of whom were said to be unarmed and attempting to surrender. Amnesty International is seeking more information about these allegations.

"It's impossible to judge the scale of these violations - which form only part of the rising toll of victims of the war - or even confirm some of the horrific reports. What is clear is that people not involved in the fighting are being arbitrarily and deliberately killed or tortured, and that these outrages must stop."

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