

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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EXTRA 21/93

Fear for safety

2 March 1993

BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA: Non-Serbs in the Serbian controlled town of Banja Luka

Amnesty International is concerned for the safety of non-Serbs (mainly Muslims and Croats) in the town of Banja Luka in north western Bosnia and fears the possibility of arbitrary killings, torture and ill-treatment either perpetrated by the authorities or condoned by them. Such abuses may be intended to force non-Serbs from the area or to accept expulsion.

There have been numerous reports of human rights abuses against non-Serbs in Banja Luka since April 1992 when the local Bosnian Serb leadership in the form of the Serbian Democratic Party began to apply pressure on non-Serbs following the outbreak of national conflict in the republic. Prior to the conflict about 45 per cent of the population of the town and surrounding area were non-Serbs, about two thirds of them are reported to remain today. Amnesty International is particularly concerned at reports that the situation has been worsening for non-Serbs in the town in the last few weeks. There are reports of frequent incidents of violence against non-Serbs often carried out by Serbian irregular soldiers or civilians, but with the apparent complicity of the local authorities. On 28 February 1993 a Croatian house was allegedly bombed by unknown perpetrators injuring nine people, including two children. The day before three uniformed Serbian irregulars robbed a Muslim household and allegedly raped or sexually assaulted a woman in front of her husband. Many similar incidents are alleged to be occurring frequently. The remaining Muslim and Croatian leaders in the town have complained to the Serbian authorities but little has apparently been done to prevent such incidents. Large numbers of non-Serb men have also been given call-up papers to fight in the Bosnian Serb army, those refusing have reportedly been beaten as a result (many non-Serbs mobilized in this way in other areas have reportedly been made to fight or work in the most dangerous positions on the front lines).

Other forms of pressure have also been applied to the non-Serb population, for instance the bombing or destruction of buildings such as Mosques and Catholic churches and dismissals from employment. As a consequence, many non-Serbs have fled Serbian-controlled Bosnia or sought to leave. Most of those leaving have had to pay large sums of money and sign documents before being allowed to go. A group of non-Serbs transported by bus from the Banja Luka area on 26 February 1993 were reportedly fired upon by Serbian soldiers as they crossed into Bosnian Government-controlled territory near Travnik.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Huge suffering has occurred in Bosnia-Herzegovina since fighting broke out surrounding the declaration of the republic's independence from the Yugoslav state in spring 1992. This war has recently become more clearly a three-sided conflict involving Bosnian Serb forces, Bosnian Croat forces and the largely Muslim Bosnian Government forces. All three sides also have paramilitary groups fighting with them. However, there has been no fighting reported in the Banja Luka area recently and it is firmly under the control of Bosnian Serb armed forces. The suffering has included human rights abuses on a huge scale, including deliberate and arbitrary killings, torture and ill-treatment and arbitrary detention. All

sides have been responsible for abuses to some extent. Some of these incidents are documented in Amnesty International reports including Bosnia-Herzegovina: Gross Abuses of basic human rights (AI Index: EUR 63/01/92, October 1992), Bosnia-Herzegovina: Rape and sexual abuse by armed forces (AI Index: EUR 63/01/93, January 1993) and Rana u duši - A wound to the soul (AI Index: EUR 63/03/93, January 1993).

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Amnesty International has documented patterns of human rights violations similar to those reported in Banja Luka which go together with other actions either carried out or condoned by local Bosnian Serb authorities aimed at the forced expulsion of non-Serbs from many Bosnian Serb-controlled towns. The report Rana u duši - A wound to the soul (see above) illustrates such patterns by describing events in Bosanski Petrovac, about 90 kilometres west of Banja Luka. Fresh expulsions are also feared in other towns (see UA 35/93, EUR 63/04/93 of 11 February 1993 concerning Janja in eastern Bosnia).

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

- stressing that Amnesty International is concerned for victims of human rights violations of all nationalities in the former Yugoslavia;
- expressing concern about reports of human rights violations against non-Serbs in the town of Banja Luka in recent weeks;
- urging the authorities to take urgent measures to ensure that the local security forces or irregulars are effectively controlled and that strict orders are issued to ensure that they abide by international human rights and humanitarian law standards;
- urging them to instigate thorough and impartial investigations into reported killings and ill-treatment of local non-Serbs;
- urging that any individuals suspected of ordering abuses or being complicit in allowing any such as deliberate and arbitrary killings, torture or ill-treatment be removed from any position of authority and that they be held to account for their actions;
- demanding that the those who wish to leave Serbian-controlled territory are allowed safe passage without conditions, avoidable risks or prejudice to the possibility of their return.

APPEALS TO

1) The head of security in the Banja Luka police:

Slobodan _upljanin

SUP - Centar slu_bi bezbjednosti

Salutation: Dear Commander

Maršala Tita bb

78000 Banja Luka

Yugoslavia (for Bosnia-Herzegovina)

Telegrams: Zupljanin, Sef bezbjednosti, SUP, Banja Luka, Yugoslavia

Telexes: Via central post office, Banja Luka, Yugoslavia 45911

2) The military commander for the Banja Luka region:

General Momir Tali_

Trg Lenjina bb

Salutation: Dear General

78000 Banja Luka

Yugoslavia (for Bosnia-Herzegovina)

Telegrams: General Talic, komandant okruga, Banja Luka, Yugoslavia

Telexes: Via central post office, Banja Luka, Yugoslavia 45911

3) The head of the Serbian Democratic Party in Banja Luka:

Radosav Brdjanin

Predsjednik SDS - Banja Luka

Salutation: Dear Mr Brdjanin

78000 Banja Luka

Yugoslavia (for Bosnia-Herzegovina)

Telegrams: Brdjanin, Predsjednik SDS, Banja Luka, Yugoslavia
Telexes: Via central post office, Banja Luka, Yugoslavia 45911

4) The Representative of the Bosnian Serbs:

Dr Radovan Karad_i_
Biro Republike Srpske
Moše Pijade 8
11000 Beograd, Yugoslavia

Salutation: Dear Dr Karad_i_

Telegrams: Representative of the Bosnian Serbs Karad_i_, Beograd, Yugoslavia

Faxes: + 38 11 338 633

5) Commander of Serbian forces in Bosnia-Herzegovina:

General Ratko Mladi_
Biro Republike Srpske
Moše Pijade 8
11000 Beograd, Yugoslavia

Salutation: Dear General Mladi_

Telegrams: Commander of Serbian forces in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Mladi_, Beograd,
Yugoslavia

Faxes: + 38 11 338 633

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 31 March 1993.