

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

EXTERNAL

AI Index: EUR 63/10/94

12 May 1994

### BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

Amnesty International is concerned that a group of 11 relief workers (10 men and one woman) are being held as hostages by the *de facto* Bosnian Serb authorities.

According to the French daily *Libération* of 9 May, on 8 April 1994, a convoy of seven lorries, driven by aid workers of the French relief agency *Première Urgence* was stopped by Bosnian Serb soldiers, just before entering the Sarajevo suburb of Ilidža. The aid workers were arrested - allegedly for having crossed into territory held by the Bosnian Serbs without permission - and detained in a nearby hotel. The leader of the convoy, asked for permission to let the drivers guard their vehicles overnight but this was refused. The next day, Bosnian Serb soldiers allegedly found five cases of ammunition in two of the seven lorries, plus a revolver in the car of the convoy leader. A camera crew of the Bosnian Serb television was present during the search. The *de facto* Bosnian Serb authorities are accusing the aid workers of arms smuggling in the favour of the mainly Muslim Bosnian Government army.

The 11 have been detained in a prison in Kula, another Sarajevo suburb to the east of the town. Two weeks after their detention, following appeals for access to the detainees by the International Committee of the Red Cross and *Première Urgence*, the *de facto* Bosnian Serb health minister, Dragan Kalinić, proposed the exchange of the aid workers for 11 medical staff held by the mainly Muslim Bosnian authorities.

Meanwhile, on 6 May, *Première Urgence* said it had been notified that three of the 11 aid workers would be brought to trial before a military tribunal on 8 May.

However, on that date the three investigating military judges announced that the trial would be postponed, pending the investigation, and prolonged the detention order by one month. To Amnesty International's knowledge, no charges have yet been issued by the *de facto* Bosnian Serb prosecuting authorities. On 12 May the *Reuters* news agency reported that Radovan Karadžić, the leader of the *de facto*

Bosnian Serb authorities had "decided to find a legal form for [their] release".

On the basis of this and other information, Amnesty International believes the 11 French aid workers are held as hostages, detained solely for the purpose of securing the release of prisoners held by the Bosnian Government authorities and in contravention of international humanitarian standards.

The 1949 Geneva Conventions for the protection of victims of war expressly prohibit the taking of hostages in any armed conflict, whether a civil war or international war. Hostage-taking can also amount to a war crime for which individuals can be prosecuted and tried by the International War Crimes Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia.

## APPENDIX 1

EXTERNAL  
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*DOCTORS AND NURSES ARRESTED IN SARAJEVO*

*Drs Đejan KAFKA, Ranko MEDAN, Igor ŠABLAK  
 Nemanja VELJKOV, Marko VUKOVI\_ (all male) and  
 three female nurses (names unknown)*

*BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA*

Amnesty International is concerned about reports of the continuing detention of a group of five doctors and three nurses who were detained by Bosnian Government forces in Sarajevo early in January 1994. The majority are of Serbian nationality, although there is one Croat among the group and another is known to be Jewish.

Dr Đejan Kafka is a paediatric surgeon who, until recently, worked in the Roševo hospital in Sarajevo. The other doctors and nurses were also working in the same hospital. Drs Medan and Veljkov are specialists in internal medicine; the specialities of the others are not known. All were arrested in early January and it is believed that the authorities may be investigating them for alleged "desertion" or trying to cross to Bosnian Serb-controlled territory without permission. It appears that they are being held in the Viktor Bubanj army barracks where it has been alleged that they have been ill-treated. Reports of their ill-treatment are impossible to confirm, although the frequency with which detainees have been tortured or ill-treated by all sides in Bosnia-Herzegovina indicates that this is a real concern.

Delegates of the International Committee of the Red Cross are reported to have visited the group in detention.

Roševo hospital is the main hospital in Sarajevo. It has frequently been hit by shelling during the siege of the town by Bosnian Serb forces which is now almost two years old. In one of the recent attacks on the hospital, in late November, two nurses were killed and three doctors injured by shells which an officer of the United Nations Protection Force believed to have been fired by Bosnian Serb artillery.

Although it is difficult to confirm the details of this case, Amnesty International is concerned that the men and women may be held solely on account of their nationality. The organization believes that the mere fact of having tried to cross to a Bosnian Serb-occupied area of Bosnia-Herzegovina -- if this is what they have attempted -- should not in itself be a punishable offence and that no presumptions should be made about their motives for doing this. Although it is impossible to confirm whether they have been ill-treated, all three sides are known to have ill-treated many of the thousands of people who have been detained in Bosnia-Herzegovina and this remains a continuing concern.