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Bosnia-Herzegovina: General Radislav Krstic found guilty of genocide

Amnesty International welcomes today's verdict by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (Tribunal) which finds General Radislav Krstic guilty of genocide committed after the fall of Srebrenica. He was sentenced to 46 years imprisonment, the longest sentence so far handed down by the Tribunal.

The verdict represents a significant contribution in achieving justice for the thousands of victims of summary executions in Srebrenica and their relatives, Amnesty International said. This verdict - the first handed down by the Tribunal for genocide - also recognizes the magnitude of the systematic violations of international humanitarian law perpetrated by the Bosnian Serbs against largely unarmed Bosnian Muslim soldiers and civilians.

In particular the presiding judge acknowledged the serious mental harm done to the relatives of those who were killed at Srebrenica, describing them as living amputated lives, six years after the massacre.

Although this verdict is legally significant, the judicial process should also contribute to ending the continued impunity that obstructs the return of those who were expelled from Srebrenica, added the organization. The responsible authorities should arrest both those who actually pulled the trigger, as well as those responsible for planning and ordering the massacre at Srebrenica at a higher military and political level.

The organization notes that although hundreds of soldiers participated in the murders of those at Srebrenica, only two of those responsible have so far been brought to justice for their crimes by the Tribunal. No trials for Srebrenica have taken place in Bosnian courts.

Amnesty International calls on the government of Republika Srpska to take responsibility for carrying out the arrest and transfer to the Tribunal of all indicted suspects who have remained at large in the entity since the end of the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

The organization also urged the Stabilization Force (SFOR) to adopt a more aggressive arrest strategy. Only one suspect has been arrested by SFOR so far this year. We have repeatedly called on the NATO-led Implementation Force (IFOR) and its successor, SFOR, to comply with their duty under international law and the Dayton Peace Agreement to seek out and arrest those indicted by the Tribunal, the organization emphasized.

Amnesty International also stressed the importance - for the families of those massacred at Srebrenica - of the identification of the estimated 4,000 bodies exhumed to date from mass graves. Until their loved ones are identified and the bodies handed over to the families for burial, the relatives are unlikely to feel that justice has been done.

The organization called on the international community to ensure continued support for the DNA-based identification programme carried out by the Missing Persons Institute (MPI) in Bosnia-Herzegovina, recently established by the International Committee for Missing Persons.

Radislav Krstić has the right to appeal against the verdict and the sentence to the Appeals Chamber.

Background

The trial of Bosnian Serb General Radislav Krstij, the first senior officer in the Bosnian Serb Army to appear before the Tribunal, started on 13 March 2000. He was charged with eight counts of genocide, complicity to commit genocide, crimes against humanity and violations of the laws and customs of war. This is the first trial of a senior Bosnian Serb officer on charges of genocide, relating to the massacre of men and boys at Srebrenica, and has included evidence gathered from the exhumations of individuals believed to have been killed when the UN-protected enclave fell in July 1995. A total of 128 witnesses were called, including the wives and mothers of men and boys killed at Srebrenica.

Radislav Krstij was commander of the Second Brigade of the Romanija Corps of the Bosnian Serb Army; when this was merged with the Drina Corps in 1992, Krstij became its deputy commander.

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