

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

AI Index: EUR 63/11/93

Distr: UA/SC

EXTRA 39/93 Fear of further deliberate and 26 April 1993
arbitrary killings

BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA: Civilian population in central Bosnia

Amnesty International is concerned about continuing reports of grave human rights abuses against the civilian population by armed Croatian and Muslim forces in central Bosnia-Herzegovina. These abuses include many deliberate and arbitrary killings, ill-treatment and arbitrary arrests and the organization fears that further abuses may occur.

The abuses have occurred during renewed fighting between Bosnian Croatian forces of the Croatian Defence Council (HVO) and the mainly Muslim Bosnian Government armed forces. The two forces have been fighting for control over territories around the central Bosnian towns of Vitez and Zenica and the towns of Jablanica and Konjic further to the south-east. Incidents have occurred in other towns. It appears that the two forces are fighting to secure territory they believe would be apportioned to them under the terms of a United Nations (UN) backed peace proposal, generally referred to as the Vance-Owen peace plan. Both sides are said to have committed abuses, but so far the majority of reported victims appear to be Muslim civilians.

According to Croatian radio reports on 14 and 15 April 1993, Muslim forces attacked villages around Konjic, near Mostar, expelling Croats from seven villages. The same source stated that on 16 and 17 April Muslim forces attacked HVO headquarters in Vitez and in Travnik in central Bosnia. Croatian sources have also alleged mass arrests of Croats in Travnik and Zenica and UN officials have reported meeting over 700 Croats fleeing Muslim forces north of Zenica.

A report in the British newspaper, the Guardian, of 22 April 1993 referred to arbitrary killings by HVO forces on 18 April in the village of Santi_i just outside Vitez, where soldiers of the UN peace-keeping force (UNPROFOR) recovered the corpses of more than 30 Muslims, apparently civilians. The New York Times of 21 April 1993 quoted a report from the UN High Commissioner of Refugees (UNHCR) which states that Muslims had been found reportedly killed by shots to the head fired at close range in villages around Vitez. Two Muslim doctors travelling from Zenica to Travnik had been halted at a checkpoint and killed by shots to the head. UNPROFOR soldiers also found the bodies of 10 Muslim civilians including women and one child, shot dead near the village of Ahini_i according to a report in another British newspaper, the Independent, of 21 April 1993. The same report, quoting anonymous UN sources, said Croat soldiers had gang-raped Muslim women in Vitez, and gangs of soldiers from both sides had gone on the rampage through each others' villages. Amnesty International has in addition received reports that the HVO has made mass arrests of Muslims in the area of _apljina, south of Mostar, where over 300 Muslims are allegedly held in military barracks.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Gross abuses of human rights have occurred on a horrifying scale in Bosnia-Herzegovina since the outbreak of armed conflict in March 1992 after the leadership of the republic's Serbian Democratic Party refused to acknowledge the declaration of independence of the republic following a referendum the same month which was boycotted by most Serbs. The majority of abuses have been committed by Bosnian Serb forces against Muslim or Croat victims. However, all sides have been responsible for abuses to some extent.

Page 2 of EXTRA 39/93

Although HVO and Bosnian Government forces are nominal allies against Serbian forces, there has been considerable tension between them over the status of the territory controlled by the HVO. In July 1992 this area was proclaimed by Bosnian Croatian leaders as an autonomous region called the "Croatian Community of Herzeg-Bosna". The Bosnian Government has little authority in these areas which have largely been assigned to the Croats in the Vance-Owen peace plan. The first serious clashes between the two forces occurred in Prozor in October 1992.

The Bosnian President, Alija Izetbegovi_, and the Bosnian Croat leader, Mate Boban, have repeatedly reaffirmed their alliance and joint patrols have taken place in some areas where their forces are more finely balanced in an attempt to prevent incidents. However, on 4 April 1993 the HVO demanded that Bosnian Government troops withdraw by 15 April from the areas assigned to Bosnian Croats under the Vance-Owen peace plan. On 21 April the Chief of the HVO and the Supreme Command of the Bosnian Government forces agreed a cease-fire, but this has since been repeatedly broken.

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

- expressing extreme concern about reports of grave human rights abuses, including arbitrary killings, arrests and ill-treatment of civilians and captured combatants;
- urging both sides to abide by fundamental human rights standards and humanitarian law standards, in particular the four 1949 Geneva Conventions and Additional Protocols;
- urging both authorities to strengthen the chain of command and exercise effective control to prevent further human rights abuses occurring;
- urging both authorities to immediately and unconditionally release all civilians that have been detained solely because of their national origin or that are being held as hostages;
- stressing that no one - whether detained or not - should be tortured or subjected to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment;
- stressing that Amnesty International is concerned for victims of all nationalities and is appealing to both sides in this case;
- stating that Amnesty International believes that abuses committed by one side cannot be used as justification for acts carried out by the other.

APPEALS TO

1) Representative for the Bosnian Croats:

Mate Boban

Glavni Ured Hrvatskog Vije_a Obrane

Trg Rondo BB

88000 Mostar

Bosnia-Herzegovina (via Croatia)

Faxes : + 38 58 841 455

Salutation : Dear Mr Boban

2) Head of the Croatian Defence Council:

General Milivoj Petkovi_
Glavni Ured Hrvatskog Vije_a Obrane
Trg Rondo BB
88000 Mostar
Bosnia-Herzegovina (via Croatia)
Faxes: + 38 58 841 455

Salutation : Dear General

3) President of the Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina:

His Excellency Dr Alija Izetbegovi_
Predsjednik Republike Bosne i Hercegovine
Ambasada Bosne i Hercegovine
Pantov_ak 96
41000 Zagreb
Croatia
Faxes: + 38 41 441 899

Salutation : Dear President

COPIES OF YOUR APPEALS TO: Croatian and Bosnian diplomatic representatives in your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 26 May 1993.