

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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EXTRA 83/95 Arbitrary Detention/Fear of Torture or other
Ill-treatment/Forcible Expulsion

14 July 1995

BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA Bosnian Muslim refugees from Srebrenica

There are serious fears for the safety of Bosnia Muslims refugees fleeing the United Nations (UN) "safe area" of Srebrenica in eastern Bosnia, following reports of the arbitrary detention of men of military age (16 years and over) and the treatment of civilian refugees by Bosnian Serb armed forces. Amnesty International is further concerned that international observers have not been granted access to those detained (who, according to Bosnian Serb officials, are to be "screened" for alleged war crimes).

On 11 July 1995, forces of the Bosnian Serb army (BSA) entered the town of Srebrenica. Members of the UN Protection Force (UNPROFOR) and refugees from the town withdrew to an UNPROFOR compound at Poto_ari, five kilometres north of the town. Some 2,500 refugees entered the compound and up to 30,000 more were reported to have gathered immediately outside it.

The following day, 12 July, the BSA continued its advance and took control of Poto_ari. Men of over 16 years of age were separated from the women and children and taken to a football stadium in the nearby town of Bratunac (which has been under Bosnian Serb control since mid-1992), where they were reportedly to be interrogated to establish whether or not they had been responsible for alleged war crimes. International observers have not been permitted access to these detainees and Amnesty International fears that they may be at risk of torture or other forms of ill-treatment.

Amnesty International is further disturbed by reports that women, children and wounded, who have been transported out of Poto_ari towards the front lines in buses and lorries, are being forced to walk up to 10 kilometres in order to cross into Bosnian Government-held territory. There have also been unconfirmed reports that, despite promises of safe conduct, several young women in these groups have been abducted by members of the BSA as they attempted to make the crossing.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In April 1992, Srebrenica was besieged by Serbian armed forces. They were unable to capture the town, but neither were defending forces able to lift the siege. Refugees and displaced persons from the surrounding area fled to its relative safety, so that by early 1993 its pre-war population of less than 5,000 had risen to around 25,000. A blockade of humanitarian aid led to attempts by the UN to evacuate wounded and women and children, although this was met with objections by the local authorities. On 16 April 1993, UN Resolution 819 declared Srebrenica and its surroundings a "safe area", and demanded that military activity in the area should cease. Units of UNPROFOR were stationed in the area to ensure the security of the inhabitants and monitor the ceasefire.

Despite this, the area was not completely demilitarized and low level military activity continued, including shelling of the town by the BSA who were also involved in armed clashes with members of the mainly Muslim Bosnian Government army (ABiH). Refugees continued to enter the town and by mid-1995 there were reported to be 40,000 people in the town itself.

On 8 July 1995, the BSA mounted an attack and overran UN posts, taking 15 UNPROFOR troops prisoner. Some UNPROFOR troops attempting to retreat from their positions came under attack by the ABiH and one was killed. The attack continued on the following day when further UN personnel were taken prisoner. On 10 July, shelling of the town was followed by an infantry attack, and 4,000 refugees from the surrounding area fled to the town. Despite UN warnings that further military action would be met with close air support, the attack was resumed the following day and although attacks by NATO aircraft resulted in two BSA tanks being hit, the town was occupied by BSA forces.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send faxes either in English, German or French or in your own language:

- expressing concern about the arbitrary detention of men of 16 and over, following the capture of Srebrenica; urging that they be granted full safeguards according to international human rights and humanitarian law and, in particular, that they be protected from ill-treatment and torture;
- calling for international observers to be given full and unrestricted access to them;
- expressing concern about the forcible expulsion of women, children, the elderly and the injured from Srebrenica and Poto_ari.

APPEALS TO:

1) Representative of Bosnian Serb *de facto* authorities

Radovan Karad_i_
Pale

Bosnia-Herzegovina

Faxes : * 381 71 783 497

Salutation: Dear Dr Karad_i_

2) Member of Bosnian Serb *de facto* authorities believed to be responsible for human rights

Vitomir Popovic

Banja Luk

Bosnia-Herzegovina

Faxes: * 381 78 303 14

Salutation: Dear Mr Popovic

Please note that the international telephone code is for the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (381). The code for Bosnia-Herzegovina (387) should not be used. Connections may be difficult to obtain and persistence may be necessary. If there is a recorded message in German saying "no connection under this area code", please try later. **We have been unable to obtain alternative number. It may be particularly difficult to obtain the second number so please try to ensure that faxes are sent at least to the first addressee.**

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 11 August 1995.