

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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Further information on UA 315/93 (EUR 63/18/93, 9 September 1993) - Deliberate and arbitrary detention of civilians/deliberate and arbitrary killings/fear of torture and ill-treatment. Additional new concern : Hostage taking

Bosnia-Herzegovina: Detained Muslim civilians and prisoners of war in Bosnian Croat controlled areas of Bosnia-Herzegovina

Amnesty International remains deeply concerned about the fate of the Muslim civilian population in Bosnian Croat controlled areas of central Bosnia. New reports state that, despite releases of detainees by Croat forces, large numbers of Bosnian Muslims remain detained. Amnesty International believes that a considerable proportion of these people are civilians.

According to the accounts of those released, conditions in places of detention are extremely bad with many of the prisoners being in a state of severe malnutrition. In an interview, published in the French daily *Libération* of 11 September 1993, several of the released detainees stated that they were beaten daily as well as ill-treated. In July, after an uprising amongst the prisoners was quelled, 10 detainees, soldiers of the Bosnian Army, were reportedly beaten to death with miners' bars, and another three shot dead.

On 23 September, a total of 541 detainees were released from the Dretelj camp near _apljina in central Bosnia, and taken to the Croatian island of Kor_ula where they were under UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) protection. They were given temporary refugee status. A smaller group of detainees had been released four days before. According to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) all those released were freed on medical grounds as they all suffered from malnutrition. The UNHCR said that some 1,000 detainees remained in Dretelj.

The ICRC stated in mid-August that 6,474 detainees were being held by the three warring sides in 51 camps. Some 4,400 were held by Bosnian Croats, 1,400 by the Muslim-led Bosnian government, and 675 by Bosnian Serbs. After the release of the 541, some 5,959 prisoners are known to remain (of whom some 4000 are held by the Bosnian Croats) but the ICRC assumes that their real number is certainly higher. The ICRC complained that it had not been allowed access to all the camps, as has frequently been the case.

Furthermore, on 30 September, a UNHCR official said that Croat forces had taken more than 800 Muslims, mostly women and children, to Rotilj, a village near the town of Kiseljak, a Croatian stronghold west of Sarajevo. The Muslims came from eight nearby settlements and have been gradually rounded up over the past month. According to the UNHCR, some of them had reported several cases of harassment and maltreatment by Croat armed forces and irregulars prior to their transfer to Rotilj. On 5 October BBC Television reported that 100 men of military age were among those detained in the village and that they had been made to dig trenches near front lines. Although the transfer was said to ensure the protection of the civilians, Amnesty International fears that, in effect, the Muslims may be held as hostages to be exchanged for Bosnian Croats detained by Bosnian government forces. The taking of hostages is prohibited by Common

Article 3 (b) of the four Geneva Conventions of 1949, and in Article 4(c) of the Additional Protocol to these Conventions.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

On 28 August 1993, Mate Boban, president of the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) - sister party of its namesake in Croatia - proclaimed the "Croatian Republic of Herzeg-Bosna". The projected territory of this entity is an as yet not fully defined region in the south-west of Bosnia-Herzegovina, concentrated around the traditionally Croat-dominated area of Western Herzegovina. Mostar, Bosnia's second-largest town with a mixed population of Croats and Muslims, is the major town of the area under Bosnian-Croat control. The proclamation was welcomed by Croatian President, Franjo Tudjman, on 29 August. Among other things he stated at a press conference, broadcast by Croatian Radio on 6 September, that: ".it is no secret that these Croats in Bosnia-Herzegovina have collaborated with Croatia's state policies, that we have been aiding the Croats in Bosnia-Herzegovina to defend themselves from Muslim aggression". Since spring 1992 there have been persistent reports of direct Croatian Army involvement in Bosnia-Herzegovina, although these have been continually denied by the Croatian authorities.

FURTHER RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send faxes/express and airmail letters in English or your own language:

- welcoming the release of the detained civilians from the Dretelj camp;
- urging that the remaining civilians detained solely because of their national or ethnic origin or held as hostages be released unconditionally;
- stressing once more that Amnesty International is concerned for victims of all nationalities and that this is one of its regular appeals to all sides involved in the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina;
- expressing concern about reports indicating that Croatian troops are holding a considerable number of Muslim civilians hostage and urging that they be allowed to leave the locations where they are being held against their will;
- urging that Croatian forces in Bosnia-Herzegovina abide by fundamental human rights standards and humanitarian law standards, in particular the four 1949 Geneva Conventions and additional protocols;
- urging that international humanitarian organizations such as the International Committee of the Red Cross be given access to all places where Croatian forces are holding detainees;
- stressing that no one - whether detained or not - should be tortured or subjected to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment;
- stating that Amnesty International believes that abuses committed by one side cannot be used as justification for acts carried out by another

APPEALS TO:

1. Leader of the Croatian Defence Council (HVO)

Mate Boban

Ured Hrvatskog Vijeća Obrane

88340 Grude

Croatia (for Bosnia-Herzegovina)

Faxes: +38 58 366 019

Salutation: Dear Mr Boban

(Please note that, since postal services to Bosnia-Herzegovina are unreliable, it may be better to send faxes where possible)

2. President of the Republic of Croatia

His Excellency Dr Franjo Tudjman

Predsjednik Republike Hrvatske
Visoka 22
41000 Zagreb
Croatia

Telegrams: President of Croatia, Zagreb, Croatia

Faxes: + 38 41 444 532

Salutation: Dear President

(Please note: Although President Tudjman does not officially have direct control over the Bosnian Croat forces, you should refer to his admitted support for the HVO [see background information] and urge him to do everything in his power to ensure that the concerns stated above are addressed.

and to diplomatic representatives of Bosnia-Herzegovina accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 16 November 1993.