

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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Deliberate and arbitrary killings/"disappearances"/fear
of arbitrary detentions

BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA Muslim civilian population in central Bosnia

Amnesty International is deeply concerned by reports of the massacre on 23 October 1993 of 80 Muslims in the village of Stupni Do, south of the town of Vareš in central Bosnia. Most of the victims are said to have been civilians - women, children and elderly people.

Survivors have spoken of how Bosnian Croat forces (HVO) attacked the Muslim village, which was poorly defended. They have alleged that masked Croatian soldiers threw the bodies of Muslims into burning buildings. Some have also alleged they saw Croatian soldiers raping women. A group of about 120 villagers were reportedly taken away by the HVO. Their current whereabouts remain unknown. Amnesty International fears for their safety.

Soldiers of the United Nations Protection Forces (UNPROFOR) gained access to the village on 26 October and confirmed atrocities had taken place. Most houses in the village had been burnt down and among the ruins they found the corpses of three women, apparently executed after they were found hiding in a cellar. One of them had had her throat slit and the other two had been shot in the face.

UNPROFOR soldiers escorted 15 survivors, who had been hiding in the surrounding woods, to a nearby Muslim-held village. UNPROFOR fears that many more civilians may have been killed or detained by Croatian forces, who had prevented UNPROFOR from entering the village by laying mines and anti-tank weapons in the vicinity.

HVO forces also allegedly ransacked Datanska, another village in the Vareš area. UN military observers who had gained limited access to the village found the bodies of two civilians in a cellar, both shot through the head.

An UNPROFOR officer said on 25 October that his forces were monitoring a school building in the Croatian stronghold of Vareš where 233 Muslims were held in detention by HVO forces. He said he was concerned for their safety since the HVO had denied UNPROFOR access to them and shots had been heard from inside the building.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Vareš lies in a mountainous area some 50 km north of the besieged capital of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Sarajevo. Under the Vance-Owen peace plan it would be allocated to the Muslim side. The town, with a pre-war population of 20,000

has become one of the Bosnian Croat strongholds in central Bosnia, after a weak military alliance between Bosnian Croat forces and the mainly Muslim Bosnian Government army broke down in May this year. Since then, there has been a rapprochement between the HVO and the Bosnian Serb army besieging the nearby Sarajevo area, while fighting with the Bosnian Government forces steadily increased. In late June, HVO forces started terrorising the Muslim population in villages around Vareš, as a result of which many of them left. In the meantime the population inside Vareš swelled to twice its original number, due to an influx of Croatian refugees who had been expelled by Bosnian Government forces from the Travnik region.

HVO forces operating in central Bosnia are responsible to Mate Boban, who proclaimed himself president of the "Croatian Republic of Herzeg-Bosna" on 28 August 1993. The next day, Croatian President Tudjman welcomed the proclamation and stated that he would help the "Croats in Bosnia-Herzegovina to defend themselves from Muslim aggression".

In a letter, sent to President Tudjman in early September, Mate Boban stressed his willingness to "abide by international war and humanitarian law" and stated that he had ordered all HVO units to strictly observe this decision. However Amnesty International is concerned that incidents such as the massacre at Stupni Do and human rights violations in the nearby area show that both Mate Boban and President Tudjman have not done everything in their power to strengthen the chain of command in their respective armed forces in order to make them observe fundamental humanitarian law.

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

- stressing Amnesty International's concern about reports of deliberate and arbitrary killings of Muslims carried out by Croatian forces;
- stressing that Amnesty International is concerned for victims of all nationalities and is regularly appealing to all sides involved in the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina;
- urging the release of all civilians detained solely because of their national or ethnic origin or held as hostages;
- urging that Croatian forces in Bosnia-Herzegovina abide by fundamental human rights 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. 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 5 41 444 532

Salutation: Dear President

(NB: 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.

2. Minister of Defence of Croatia

Mr Gojko Sušak

Ministarstvo za narodnu obranu Republike Hrvatske

Opati_ka 1

41000 Zagreb

Croatia

Telegrams: Minister of Defence, Zagreb, Croatia

Faxes: +38 5 450 236

Salutation: Dear Minister

3. Leader of the Croatian Defence Council (HVO)

Mate Boban

Ured Hrvatskog Vije_a Obrane

88340 Grude

Croatia (for Bosnia-Herzegovina)

Faxes: +38 5 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)

and to diplomatic representatives of Croatia in your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 7 December 1993.