

EXTERNAL

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£CROATIA

@Rasim KAHRIMANOVI_ - "**Disappearance**"

Forty-three-year-old Rasim Kahrmanovi_ is a Muslim born in Bosnia-Herzegovina. In 1992 he joined the Army of Bosnia-Herzegovina (*Armija B-H*) as an officer. In February 1993 he started to travel between Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina to work on the procurement of supplies. In March 1993 he was unable to return to Bosnia-Herzegovina as hostilities developed between the mainly Muslim *Armija B-H* and the Bosnian Croat forces (*Hrvatsko Vije_e Obrane [HVO]* - Croatian Defence Council) in central and southern Bosnia-Herzegovina. Rasim Kahrmanovi_ then went to Dubrovnik on the Croatian coast to be with his wife who was living there as a refugee. In April he reportedly went to the police in Dubrovnik upon the expiry of his original permission to be in Croatia, the police told him verbally that he would be allowed to stay, but to remain in Dubrovnik only. He remained in Dubrovnik selling fruit and vegetables in the market together with his wife.

On 18 July 1993 Rasim Kahrmanovi_ was reportedly summoned by telephone to report to the police to answer allegations that he had been involved in the smuggling of foodstuffs. He went to the police station at 8.30am the following morning and returned at about 10 or 11am. He left again shortly after, reportedly accompanied by two or three police officers in plain clothes. Rasim Kahrmanovi_'s wife stated that a few days before his "disappearance", she had been questioned by a Bosnian Croat policeman as she travelled along the Croatian coast north of Dubrovnik and passed through a small strip of coastline which belongs to Bosnia-Herzegovina and is under the control of the HVO. The policeman reportedly expressed his anger at having lost a relative in fighting with the *Armija B-H*. He took down her personal details, having established that her husband had fought in the *Armija B-H* and was in Dubrovnik.

Rasim Kahrmanovi_'s wife went twice to the police station in the following days seeking information about her husband but was given no useful information. She desisted after she was threatened that her refugee status might be endangered because she had allegedly worked without permission. Since then she has heard rumours that her husband has been seen in various locations in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, but she has no reason to believe that there is any foundation to them.

Amnesty International is concerned that Rasim Kahrmanovi_ has been deliberately "disappeared" either by Croatian police officers or by Bosnian Croat

police or military officers working with the cooperation of the Croatian police. Although he was an officer in the *Armija B-H*, Croatia was not officially in conflict with Bosnia-Herzegovina and, if detained, Amnesty International does not believe that he could be considered a prisoner of war. The organization calls upon the Croatian authorities to initiate an impartial and independent inquiry into his "disappearance"; to make public the results of the inquiry; to release him immediately if it is found that he is being detained and there is no legal basis for his detention; if it is found that he is dead, to initiate a thorough and impartial investigation into the circumstances in which died; to bring to justice any officials responsible for perpetrating Rasim Kahrmanovi_'s "disappearance".

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The *Armija B-H* and HVO fought in an uneasy alliance against Bosnian Serb forces until the spring of 1993 when increasing tension and frequent clashes between the two forces developed into open warfare. Inside Bosnia-Herzegovina both sides were responsible for perpetrating deliberate and arbitrary killings, "disappearances", arbitrary arrests of civilians and torture and ill-treatment against Croats and Muslims respectively.¹ Serbs or people of other nationalities were in some cases also victims of both sides in this context. A peace agreement and ceasefire which came into effect in March 1994 brought an almost complete end to reports of violations in the Muslim-Croat conflict.

Large numbers of refugees from Bosnia-Herzegovina are present in Croatia. Their situation has always been difficult because of the large number of displaced Croats in the country. The difficulties of Muslim refugees in Croatia, particularly males of military age, were exacerbated by the Muslim-Croat conflict and there were allegations that some were ill-treated by police or soldiers in Croatia or were forcibly returned to Bosnia-Herzegovina where they were handed over to the HVO and were subject to ill-treatment or other human rights abuses.

Croatia itself openly supported the HVO in its conflict with the *Armija B-H* and there was compelling evidence of direct Croatian Army involvement inside Bosnia-Herzegovina although this was officially denied by the Croatian authorities.

¹ See the Amnesty International report *Central and southwest Bosnia-Herzegovina: civilian population trapped in a cycle of violence* (AI Index: EUR 63/01/94, January 1994).