

EXTRA 93/95

Failure to provide adequate protection
from ill-treatment

10 August 1995

CROATIASerbian Refugees from Krajina

Amnesty International is concerned by the lack of adequate protection offered to Serbian refugees from the *Krajina* region passing through Croatia en route to Serbia. The refugees were travelling from the town of Topusko to Serbia via the town of Sisak. A large number of refugees who are still in Topusko are expected to follow them.

On 9 August 1995, members of the United Nations Civilian Police Monitors (UNCIVPOL) stationed in Croatia reported attacks on a Serb refugee column moving through the town of Sisak by a mob of Croatian civilians, estimated to number around 1,000 persons. Members of the mob smashed car windows and threw large stones and rocks at the refugees as they passed. Witnesses estimated that 99 per cent of a group of 2,000 that had passed through the town showed signs of bleeding or other injuries. Some of the refugees were travelling in open trucks, others were reportedly dragged from their vehicles and beaten. Croatian military and civilian police officers who were present reportedly took no action to protect the refugees from the attacks until pressed to do so by UNCIVPOL officers, when the action they did take was insufficient to provide full protection.

Amnesty International is concerned that the remaining refugees from Topusko, who have to follow the same route, may be at risk of similar attacks and should be afforded full protection by the Croatian police.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

On 4 August 1995 Croatia launched a major military action on the *Krajina*, (the former UN protected areas North and South) with the aim of regaining territory that had been under the control of the Croatian Serbs since 1991. There was little resistance, and by 7 August the majority of the territory was under Croatian control.

Immediately the offensive began people started to flee the area, and by 6 August it was thought that at least 150,000 were on the move to seek refuge in Bosnian Serb-held areas of Bosnia-Herzegovina, and in Serbia itself. A large number of refugees, estimated at 37,000, took shelter in and around the small town of Topusko in the north of the *Krajina*, which remained in Bosnian Serb hands. They were unable to leave due to continued fighting in the area. On 9 August, following the signing of an agreement between the two sides, the Croatian Serbs began to hand over their weapons and both soldiers and civilians were permitted to leave the area via the main highway leading to Serbia.

There have been serious allegations of violations of human rights in the area during this period, including the deliberate killing of a BBC journalist, allegedly by members of the Croatian Army, and the deliberate killing of a group of elderly Serb civilians, some of whom were reportedly mentally handicapped, by men in military uniform, said to have been wearing insignia of the Bosnian Army fifth Corps.

Amnesty International is aware that representatives of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) have restrictions placed on their movements in certain areas. It is unclear whether other international organizations involved in

the monitoring and protection of human rights, such as UNCIVPOL and representatives of the UN Special Rapporteur on the former Yugoslavia have also been denied free movement in all areas.

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

- calling on the Croatian authorities to ensure adequate protection to all refugees in transit through territories under their control;
- calling for representatives of international human rights organizations to be given free access to all such territories.

APPEALS TO:

(Minister of Internal Affairs)

Mr Ivan Jarnjak

Ministar

Ministarstvo za unutrašnje poslove Republike Hrvatske

Savska cesta 39

41000 Zagreb

Croatia

Telegrams: Ministar za unutrašnje poslove, Zagreb, Croatia

Faxes: +385 1 443 715

Salutation: Dear Minister

(Minister of Defence)

Mr Gojko Sušak

Ministarstvo za narodnu obranu Republike Hrvatske

Trg Kralja P. Krešimira IV br.1

10000 Zagreb

Croatia

Telegrams: Ministar za narodnu obranu, Zagreb, Croatia

Faxes: +385 1 4550 236

Salutation: Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

diplomatic representatives of Croatia accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 17 September 1995.