

UA 220/95 Fear of ill-treatment /  
Fear of extrajudicial execution

15 September 1995

**CROATIASerbs in areas retaken by Croatian Forces**

There are continuing reports of ill-treatment, intimidation, and possible extrajudicial executions being carried out by Croatian soldiers, police and armed civilians against ethnic Serbs remaining in the parts of Croatia recently retaken by Croatian forces. The Croatian Army is continuing to impose restrictions on the movement of United Nations (UN) personnel and other international agencies involved with the monitoring of human rights in the area, fuelling fears for the safety of the ethnic Serbs.

Incidents reported in recent days include:

- 8 September: two Croatian soldiers reportedly ordered an 85-year-old woman to enter her home in the village of Momilovica in former UN Protected Area (UNPA) Sector North. They then fired two shots into her house through the window;
- 4 September: an elderly man in the village of Crkveni Bok near Sunja in the former UNPA Sector North was reportedly kicked and threatened with a knife by two Croatian officers who had apparently discovered weapons in a neighbouring house. His injuries required medical treatment;
- 29 August: a woman aged about 80 was found dead in her house in the village of Kistanje near Knin. A few hours earlier she had been seen to enter the house with three Croatian soldiers in uniform who had arrived in the village. Although the body was reportedly removed by members of the Croatian Civil Defence, international observers who were able to visit the scene are reported to have discovered bloodstains on the floor and bullet holes in the walls of a room in the house.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

The area of Croatia known as the *Krajina* (the former UNPA Sectors North and South) was under the control of Croatian Serb forces from summer 1991 until early August 1995 when the Croatian Army took control in a military offensive. Around 150,000 Serbs fled from the area into Serb-controlled areas of Bosnia and Herzegovina or into Serbia. Only a relatively small number of people, mostly elderly, remained in the territory. According to Croatian authorities, 900 men were detained in the course of the offensive, and of that number around 700 remain in detention and may be subject to criminal investigations for alleged war crimes or participation in "armed rebellion".

Reports of widespread organized looting and the burning of houses, as well as other destruction of property and the killing of farm animals, are common throughout the area. The Croatian Defence Ministry has claimed that criminal acts, including looting and arson, were committed by "civilians dressed in military uniform" in the Knin area (the former Sector South) but has not admitted that soldiers were responsible for these or any other abuses. International observers have reported that armed men in civilian clothing have on occasion identified themselves to the observers as members of the Croatian Army.

Staff of the UN and other international agencies have been subjected to continual restrictions upon their movements by the Croatian Army. The authorities have sometimes claimed that the restrictions were necessary for security reasons

because Serbian soldiers were still hiding in some areas. In many cases there appears to have been little justification for these claims.

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

- expressing concern about reports which indicate that Croat soldiers may have carried out extrajudicial executions, and citing in connection the case of an elderly woman found dead in her home near Kistanja on 29 August 1995;
- expressing further concern about reports of beatings, threats and intimidation perpetrated by Croatian soldiers and police against Serbs in the former UNPA Sectors North and South;
- calling on the authorities to issue strict orders to soldiers and police to refrain from acts of violence or intimidation against civilians;
- calling upon them to initiate thorough, impartial and independent investigations to be carried out into any allegations of human rights violations which have been perpetrated and for those suspected of perpetrating such violations to be brought to justice;
- urging that all restrictions on the movements of staff of international agencies working in the areas be removed.

**APPEALS TO:**

**(Minister of Internal Affairs)**

Mr Ivan Jarnjak  
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**Faxes: +385 1 443 715**

**Salutation: Dear Minister**

**(Minister of Defence)**

Mr Gojko Sušak  
Ministarstvo za narodnu obranu Republike Hrvatske  
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Croatia

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**Faxes: +385 1 4550 236**

**Salutation: Dear Minister**

**Deputy Prime Minister (responsible for human rights issues)**

Dr Ivica Kostovi\_  
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**Telegrams: Zamjenik Predsjednika, Zagreb, Croatia**

**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 5 November 1995.