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# **BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA**

**Central and southwest Bosnia-  
Herzegovina : civilian  
population trapped in a cycle  
of violence**



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# BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

## Central and southwest Bosnia-Herzegovina : civilian population trapped in a cycle of violence

Amnesty International is deeply concerned about the civilian population in central and southwest Bosnia-Herzegovina, who continues to be subjected to gross human rights abuses. The situation in this region deteriorated dramatically from April 1993 onwards as a result of fighting between Bosnian Croat forces, also known as the HVO<sup>1</sup>, and the mainly Muslim Bosnian Government forces - also known as the *Armija Bosne i Hercegovine* (Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina). A fragile alliance between the two forces, which had been united earlier in fighting the Bosnian Serb forces, broke down around April 1993. Numerous human rights abuses, including large-scale detentions of civilians and hostage-taking, torture and ill-treatment - including rape - and deliberate and arbitrary killings have taken place in the context of this conflict. Although the majority of abuses that have occurred have been perpetrated by members of Croatian armed forces, Amnesty International has also received reports of serious abuses committed by Bosnian Government forces or paramilitaries fighting with them. The chief victims of this cycle of violence have remained the same, the civilian population, both Croats and Muslims, - as well as a smaller number of Serbs - living in central and southwestern Bosnia-Herzegovina. As the war in this part of the country has intensified and spread, Amnesty International's concern has grown for the civilian population who are trapped in this desperate situation.

Amnesty International reiterates its appeals to all political and military leaders involved in the armed conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina, to strengthen the chain of command over their armed forces, to abide by international human rights and humanitarian law, and to do everything in their power to protect civilians of any nationality in territories under their control.

### BACKGROUND

Around mid-April 1993, fighting erupted between the HVO and the mainly Muslim Bosnian Government armed forces, apparently in an attempt by the former to secure territories they believed would be apportioned to them under the terms of a

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<sup>1</sup>*Hrvatska Vijeća Obrane* - Croatian Defence Council.

United Nations (UN) backed peace plan, also known as the Vance-Owen peace plan<sup>2</sup>. The two forces initially fought for control over the Vitez and Zenica areas (under the peace plan allocated respectively to the Croat and the Muslim sides) and the area around Jablanice and Konjic (allocated to the Croat side).

However, the conflict between Croat and Bosnian Government forces has been fiercest in the area around Mostar, the largest town in the region and the second-largest town of the Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Before the outbreak of conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina in April 1992, Mostar had a mixed population, of which Croats and Muslims each made up roughly 40 per cent, and Serbs the remaining 20 per cent. Refugees recall that, before the war, like Sarajevo, the town was an example of people of different nationalities, cultures and religions living peacefully together.

The town is claimed by Mate Boban, leader of the Croatian Democratic Union (*Hrvatska Demokratska Zajednica* [HDZ]) -- a sister party of its namesake in Croatia -- as constituting the capital of the self-proclaimed "*Hrvatska Republika Herceg-Bosne*", the "Croatian Republic of Herceg-Bosna" which covers HVO controlled territory, mostly in the area known as western Herzegovina. Large parts of this territory showed a clear Croat majority in the 1991 census. However, other parts of the area, such as the town of Mostar, claim they were of mixed Croat-Muslim-Serb (and other) population. From April 1992 the HVO, which then included many Muslims, the Croatian Army and units of the fledgling Bosnian Government forces (then usually referred to as the Territorial Defence) were in confrontation with the Yugoslav National Army (which was transformed into the Bosnian Serb army) and armed Serbs fighting alongside it. In May 1992 Mate Boban demanded that all the Bosnian Government forces be placed under HVO command. By June 1992 the HVO and Territorial Defence had expelled the Serbian forces from the town<sup>3</sup>. The Bosnian Serb forces continued to bombard the town periodically from their new positions to the east. HVO and Bosnian Government forces then remained jointly in control of the town amid rising tensions between them. HVO

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<sup>2</sup>In the beginning of January 1993, Cyrus Vance and Lord Owen, respectively the UN and EC representative jointly chairing the Geneva Conference on former Yugoslavia, presented a draft peace accord for Bosnia-Herzegovina. The plan focused on a map outlining the division of Bosnia-Herzegovina into 10 provinces which would be apportioned to the three sides involved. The Bosnian Croats were to be allocated three provinces, involving the areas around Mostar, Travnik and Bosanski Brod. The plan was accepted by Mate Boban and President Alija Izetbegović and initially also by the leader of the Bosnian Serbs, Radovan Karadžić, but a few weeks later an *ad hoc* Bosnian Serb assembly rejected the plan since it meant they would have to return a third of the territory they had conquered.

<sup>3</sup>For further information on human rights abuses committed by Bosnian Serb forces during the siege see *Bosnia-Herzegovina : Gross abuses of basic human rights*, AI Index EUR 63/01/92, October 1992.

predominated on the west river bank and Bosnian Government forces on the east bank<sup>4</sup>. Also, from June 1992 onwards, incidents of abuses against the non-Croatian population (mostly Muslims<sup>5</sup>) by the HVO increased. After fighting between the two forces erupted in Mostar in May 1993, the Bosnian Government forces were surrounded on the east bank by the HVO with heavy involvement and support from the Army of the Republic of Croatia (*Hrvatska Vojska - HV*).

On 28 August 1993, Mate Boban officially proclaimed the "Croatian Republic of Herzeg-Bosna". The HDZ and HVO had previously referred to the area simply as the "Croatian Community of Herzeg-Bosna" (*Hrvatska Zajednica Herceg-Bosne*). The proclamation was welcomed by the President of Croatia, Franjo Tudjman, on 29 August. At a press conference, broadcast by Croatian Radio on 6 September, he stated : "... 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 early April 1992 there have been persistent reports of direct Croatian Army involvement in Bosnia-Herzegovina, some of which have been confirmed by international observers. The Croatian authorities have only admitted that the Croatian Army has been present in parts of eastern Herzegovina, originally with the agreement of President Izetbegović.

## DETENTIONS

A continuing feature of the Croat-Muslim conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina has been large-scale detentions by both parties, but especially by the Bosnian Croat side. On 9 May 1993, some 400 civilians of Muslim nationality were detained in a football stadium in Mostar, to be transferred to detention camps outside the city, such as the heliport of Rodoč. On 13 May, United Nations officials said that about 2,000 Muslims, mainly civilians, were being held by HVO forces in and around Mostar. At the same time Bosnian Croatian officials alleged that Bosnian Government forces had arrested about

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<sup>4</sup>Mostar is divided by the Neretva river in two roughly equal parts, the east and west bank. HVO forces are in complete control of the west bank and in addition to that they have the entire city surrounded, with the exception of a small strip of mountainous area east of the city which is held by Bosnian Serb forces (*Vojska Republike Srpske - VRS*).

<sup>5</sup>Amnesty International has also received reports of ill-treatment of Serbs living in Mostar (See AI Index : EUR 63/10/93)

a thousand Croats in the areas of Zenica and Konjic. The majority of these detainees appeared to be HVO soldiers, but apparently some civilians were also arrested. A week later, a UN spokesperson said that 1,800 Muslim civilian detainees had been released by the HVO and urged Bosnian Government forces to release detained Croats in the Konjic area.

However, in mid-July a new wave of detentions was reported. As many as 10,000 Muslim males from Mostar and surrounding areas had been detained by HVO forces, of whom a group of around 6,000 were held at the heliport of Rodoč. The detainees included people who had been arrested by the HVO in early May and who had by that time been detained for over two months. Although Mate Boban claimed the detainees were all soldiers in Bosnian Government forces, according to information received by Amnesty International, a considerable number of the detainees were civilians (see below). By 20 August, according to a report by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), some 15,000 Muslims were reported to be held in camps in and around the towns of Mostar, Čapljina and Stolac. At the end of August, some 1,500 of them were released from various camps, including the camp of Dretelj, a small town near Čapljina. The conditions and the treatment of prisoners in this camp appear to have been very bad. Prisoners released from Dretelj who complained to UNHCR officials of ill-treatment and minimal food rations in the camp, also reported arbitrary executions of prisoners held there. In July, after an uprising amongst prisoners was quelled, 10 detainees, soldiers of Bosnian Government forces, were reportedly beaten to death with crowbars and another was shot dead.

Although HVO commanders stated from the beginning that all those detained were prisoners of war, Amnesty International believes that all along, civilians were detained on a large scale as well. A group of five journalists, Džemal Hamzić, Alija Lizde, Bojana Mujanović, Selma Dizdar and Sead Beslagić, working for the Mostar radio and television station were arrested on 10 May and remained in detention until late October. An interview with Džemal Hamzić, the director of the station, was published by the Italian daily *Il Manifesto* on 27 November 1993. According to the article, Džemal Hamzić was first taken to an HVO detention camp in Ljubuški, southwest from Mostar near the border with Croatia, where he remained one month before he was transferred to the Dretelj camp, and after that to the heliport of Rodoč, just outside Mostar. He said conditions had been very bad in all the camps. In Ljubuški he had been put together with 21 others in a cell, measuring 3 metres by 1.70 metres. There had been interrogations at all times of day, almost always accompanied by ill-treatment. In Dretelj and Rodoč, he witnessed people being ill-treated and arbitrarily executed by camp guards. Detainees were forced to dig trenches in the front lines between HVO and Bosnian Government forces, and according to Hamzić, 50 prisoners were killed and 270 seriously injured while working in the "living wall", during his detention. A *Reuters* journalist spoke to

Bojana Mujanović and Selma Dizdar at the Rodoč camp in mid-October. They told him that at the time of their arrest, the HVO had promised them they would be released in a few days, which turned out to be six months. According to the *Reuters* journalist, 20 women were detained at Rodoč at the time of his visit. Some of them told him a group of about 10 children had also been held there with their mothers, but they had been moved after the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) gained access to the camp.

At that time, according to figures of the ICRC, Bosnian Government forces held 579 Croats and 650 Serbs detained in 24 camps. According to the British *Guardian* of 26 August 1993, a radical branch of the Bosnian Government forces, the MOS (*Muslimanske Oružane Snage* - Muslim Armed Forces<sup>6</sup>), rounded up Croats and Serbs and detained them in the basement of the musical academy in Zenica. Local Muslim officials claimed they were doing their best to protect citizens irrespective of their nationality and said some members of MOS forces had been arrested after police investigation, but they also tried to justify the situation by saying that it had arisen as a reaction to the treatment of Muslims by Bosnian Croats in areas around Mostar. HVO commanders in central Bosnia-Herzegovina have alleged that a much larger number of Croats are being held by Bosnian Government forces in areas in and around the cities of Jablanica, Bugojno, Konjic and Zenica. However, it has been hard to verify these allegations since in many cases it is not clear whether people have been trapped in their town or village by the fighting in surrounding areas or have been genuinely detained by armed forces. In October Amnesty International received reports that over 1,000 Croats in Bugojno had asked permission of the local Muslim authorities to leave the town. Although all of them provided names and addresses of relatives and friends who they thought would accommodate them abroad, to date, according to Amnesty International's information this permission has not been granted. Amnesty International regards this placing of restrictions on the movement of civilians in effect as hostage-taking, which is outlawed by the fourth Geneva Conventions of 1949<sup>7</sup>.

The ICRC has repeatedly complained about the difficulties it has had in gaining access to detention camps and the lack of cooperation by local commanders on all sides.

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<sup>6</sup>It is not clear to what extent these forces are under the command of the Bosnian Government forces. They are mainly composed of Muslim refugees, who were expelled from their homes by Serbs earlier on in the conflict. A number of volunteers from Islamic countries are reportedly active in these forces as well.

<sup>7</sup>A similar situation occurred in the village of Raščani, where HVO commanders did not give permission to Serbian inhabitants to leave the village. (See AI Index : EUR 63/09/93, 2 April 1993).

It has also stated that for these reasons the true number of detainees in Bosnia-Herzegovina was higher than any of their published estimates.

The situation of civilians throughout central Bosnia-Herzegovina became increasingly desperate as incidents of hostage-taking increased. At the end of September HVO forces transferred a group of more than 800 Muslim civilians to a village near Croat-held Kiseljak, where they were held, apparently as hostages to be exchanged for detained Bosnian Croats. In a number of cases, civilians were taken prisoner after their village was destroyed, but nothing more about their fate is known. Such was the case in the villages of Doljani and Stupni Do, where local civilians were captured and taken away by armed forces after massacres had taken place in both villages (see below).

## **PRISONER EXCHANGES**

On 7 and 8 October, Mate Granić, Foreign Minister of the Republic of Croatia and Jadranko Prlić, representative of the Bosnian Croats met Haris Silajdžić, the Bosnian Minister of Foreign Affairs in the presence of ICRC representatives in Zagreb. At this meeting they agreed to release all prisoners detained by their respective armed forces in Bosnia-Herzegovina and to enforce a cease-fire which would enable the ICRC to take those released to safety. At that time, according to ICRC sources, a total of some 5,000 detainees were believed to be held by the Bosnian Government forces and by HVO forces.

In the first exchange, carried out on 19 October, the HVO released some 174 Muslim prisoners from Gabela camp near Čapljina. Later another 550 Muslim detainees were taken to Goranci, north of Mostar, to be released there (around 1,000 remained, expected to be released later) while Muslim forces released 309 Croat detainees who had been held in a detention centre in Turija near Konjic.

Renewed and intensified fighting in the region has delayed further releases. On 18 November, Haris Silajdžić (now Prime Minister in the Bosnian Government), Radovan Karadžić and Mate Boban signed a six-point agreement which largely concentrated on assuring the free passage of humanitarian aid and freedom of movement for UN personnel and other humanitarian organizations delivering aid. The three men also stated that they would release, in accordance with the principles of and arrangements made by the ICRC, all civilians unlawfully detained. In the last two weeks of December, Bosnian Croat forces released 1,900 prisoners: some 1,600 detainees remain in HVO-held camps, mainly in Rodoč and Dretelj. The Bosnian Government continues to hold some 1,300 prisoners (Serbs and Croats) in 20 places of detention.

Amnesty International remains seriously concerned about the continued detention of many civilians, and in view of the difficulties experienced in getting agreements made by the political leaders of the warring parties implemented on the ground fears that further releases may again be delayed or may not take place at all. The organization therefore again appeals to all sides in the conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina to unconditionally release all civilians detained or held hostage all over the country.

Amnesty International is also concerned about the fact that most of those released from HVO camps are not offered the possibility of returning to their homes, but are in fact forcibly expelled from Bosnia-Herzegovina to the Republic of Croatia, where Amnesty International understands that they are not being allowed to register as refugees but instead must find third countries willing to accept them for resettlement.<sup>8</sup>

## **DELIBERATE AND ARBITRARY KILLINGS**

Reports of atrocities committed by Croat forces appeared early on in the conflict. On 18 April 1993, soldiers of the UN peace-keeping forces (UNPROFOR) recovered the bodies of more than 30 Muslim civilians in the village of Santići, just outside Vitez. All of them had reportedly been killed by HVO forces. In another village in the neighbourhood, Ahmići, UNPROFOR soldiers found the bodies of 10 civilians, including those of women and a child, shot dead by the HVO at close range.

Soon allegations of revenge attacks by Muslim forces appeared. Both HVO forces and Bosnian Government forces have been responsible for deliberate and arbitrary killings of civilians. Amnesty International condemns all such incidents regardless of the nationality of the perpetrators or victims. However, the organization believes that the Bosnian Government has been faster to condemn atrocities committed by their forces and to announce investigations into them.

According to testimony collected in Croatia by Amnesty International, a group of at least 50 Bosnian Government soldiers attacked the mixed Croat-Muslim village of

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<sup>8</sup>Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention prohibits "regardless of their motive", the "individual or mass forcible transfers, as well as deportations" of people who find themselves under the control of a party to the conflict "from occupied territory to the territory of the Occupying Power or to that of any other country, occupied or not ...". Breaches of Article 49 constitute a war crime.

Trusina near Konjic on the morning of 16 April. Bosnian Government soldiers in camouflage uniforms were present, described as local men; survivors reported that the attack however was led by other soldiers who were dressed predominantly in black, apparently paramilitaries. The witnesses stated that these men and a woman, who appeared to be one of the commanders, were responsible for the deaths of at least nine Croatian men, including both civilians and disarmed HVO soldiers who were shot in what appeared to be summary executions. In addition, several women and children were injured as one of the paramilitaries fired indiscriminately into a room where they were sheltering. Women and children were made to carry ammunition to Muslim positions in what may have been a form of "human shield" and women were also made to take messages to HVO soldiers in surrounding positions to surrender, with threats that women and children who had been detained would be harmed if they did not.

On 24 April a representative of the UNHCR reported that four Croatian civilians had been killed in the village of Miletići, in the Zenica region. She stated that the men had been cruelly tortured before they were killed.

According to local Croatian doctors and human rights activists, on 28 July MOS forces from Jablanica arbitrarily executed a group of Croats near the village of Doljani. The doctors and human rights workers found the bodies of at least 22 people, including five civilians and a woman. The bodies bore signs of ill-treatment and mutilation. Croatian sources have alleged, that after the attack, the Muslim soldiers captured 190 prisoners, including 78 children, and took them to Muslim-held Jablanica.

On 14 September Bosnian Government forces attacked the settlement of Uzdol, near the town of Prozor, west of Sarajevo. UNPROFOR soldiers found the bodies of 34 people. Most of them were civilians, killed while asleep or while trying to flee the attack. In the nearby hamlet of Križ, another six dead Croat civilians were found.

On 16 September, the General Staff of the Bosnian Government Army disassociated itself from these atrocities and ordered an urgent investigation into the crime. Moreover, on 22 September, President Alija Izetbegović wrote to Tadeusz Mazowiecki, the Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in former Yugoslavia, condemning the killings in Uzdol, Doljani and several other places and assured him that investigations had been initiated<sup>9</sup>.

The area around the town of Vareš, some 50 kilometres north of Sarajevo, which had been relatively peaceful until then, was drawn into the fighting in late October. The town, whose inhabitants were mainly Muslims and Croats (the latter having a slight majority) is of strategic importance to the Bosnian Government forces, as it straddles a

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<sup>9</sup>Fifth periodic report on the situation of human rights in the territory of the former Yugoslavia submitted by Tadeusz Mazowiecki, Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights, 17 November 1993.

main supply route linking the Muslim strongholds of Tuzla in eastern Bosnia-Herzegovina and Zenica to the west.

The town was one of the HVO strongholds and had escaped most of the direct fighting. However, UNPROFOR sources claimed in late June that HVO troops were terrorizing the Muslim population inside the city and in Muslim villages around it into leaving the area. At the same time, Croats who had been forced to leave their homes in the towns of Novi Travnik and Kakanj (which Croat forces had lost to the Bosnian Government army), fled in large numbers to Vareš, swelling its population to twice its size.

On 23 October HVO forces attacked the Muslim village of Stupni Do, 10 kilometres outside Vareš. The poorly-defended village fell almost immediately, after which the Croat forces reportedly killed and mutilated local Muslims. HVO forces, surrounding Stupni Do, denied UNPROFOR forces stationed in the area access to the village until three days after the massacre. When they finally entered the village, they found the bodies of 25 Muslims, many of them charred and mutilated. The majority of the dead appeared to be civilians. A British UNPROFOR commander, expressing his revulsion at the massacre, went as far as actually naming the HVO brigade and its commander which he said had been responsible. He also voiced his fears that more people might have been killed, but that their bodies had been removed or burnt by the HVO in order to destroy the evidence of what had happened. Survivors of the raid on Stupni Do reported they had seen HVO soldiers throw the bodies of their neighbours into burning houses. Two Muslim women who had managed to escape the village alleged they had been raped by Croatian soldiers. Eye-witnesses also said that a group of more than 100 Muslims had been captured and taken to an unknown destination. It later transpired they were held in two schools in Vareš.

On 28 October, Croatian Foreign Minister Mate Granić strongly condemned the crimes committed in Stupni Do and urged the Bosnian Croat leadership to assist the UN in an independent investigation into the atrocities so that the perpetrators could be brought to justice.

On 3 November HVO commanders in Vareš abandoned the town to Bosnian Government forces, who soon afterwards entered the city. The majority of the Croatian population had fled by that time. UNPROFOR forces released some 250 male Muslims, who had been detained by the HVO. Some of them had been badly beaten and otherwise ill-treated in detention.

At the beginning of November UNPROFOR soldiers stationed near the town of Bugojno reported that Muslim forces there had arbitrarily executed 19 Bosnian Croat soldiers who were trying to escape the town.

On 17 November, Monsignor Vinko Puljić, the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Bosnia-Herzegovina sent a letter to President Alija Izetbegović, complaining about the

killing of two Franciscan monks in the monastery of Fojnica by soldiers of the Bosnian Government forces. Reportedly both of them, *fra* Nikica Miličević, the chief abbot of the monastery, and his deputy, *fra* Leon Migić, had been shot from behind. In a radio interview on 18 November, President Izetbegović condemned the crime, and said he had ordered an investigation into it. However, he stressed that it was not yet certain that soldiers from the Bosnian Government Army had killed the monks. He also promised protection to the remaining monks in the monastery.

### GENERAL LACK OF SAFETY FOR THE CIVILIAN POPULATION

The current chaotic situation in towns and villages in central Bosnia-Herzegovina is almost everywhere characterized by wide-spread terror exercised by local armed forces, resulting in a total lack of security for the civilian population. Although military and paramilitary groups may have operated largely on their own initiative, Amnesty International believes that local army commanders have a duty to control all those fighting under them and that no one should be allowed to abuse human rights with impunity.

The fate of civilians in the divided and besieged city of Mostar is the best illustration of the general state of fear. From the very beginning of the conflict reports of arbitrary killings by HVO forces have reached Amnesty International. Most of these killings appear to have taken place when Muslims were evicted from the Croat-held western part of Mostar. On 1 October UN officials said that HVO forces shot dead two Muslims in a group of nearly 400 people whom they expelled under fire from the west bank. Another UN official said one week later that Croats expelled up to 30 people from their side every night, forcing them to cross the Croat-Muslim front line.

On 18 October, a Muslim female doctor working in a hospital on the east bank was reportedly shot dead by HVO soldiers in the apartment of her parents. Her father was also killed and her mother injured in the same attack.

Reports of rape have also been a regular feature of this state of terror. The British *Independent* of 21 April, quoting UN sources, reported that Croat soldiers had gang-raped Muslim women in the town of Vitez at the end of April. A Muslim woman from Mostar, whose husband had been arrested by the HVO at the end of June, told Amnesty International how she saw one of her neighbours, a Croatian woman, being dragged by HVO soldiers to an apartment where they allegedly raped her. She was apparently being punished for having helped her Muslim neighbours. Expulsions of Muslim women from

the Croat-held part of Mostar appear to have been accompanied by frequent use of sexual violence, including strip-searching and rape.

The Belgrade independent weekly *Vreme* reported one such incident on 18 October. In mid-October two HVO soldiers forced SM, a Muslim woman and her mother to leave their apartment on the left bank. They took them close to the front line, robbed them and sent the mother across the front line. SM was then taken to some nearby ruins and raped by 10 Croat soldiers. After they released her she managed to reach east Mostar.

The town of Čapljina, some 40 kilometres from Mostar, which received large numbers of Bosnian Muslims who had been driven away from other parts of Bosnia-Herzegovina, has been the scene of frequent violent repression of the Muslim population by local HVO forces. UNHCR offices located nearby reported in late July that they had started to receive reports of HVO soldiers raping Muslim women in the town.

The Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in the former Yugoslavia mentions in his interim report of 17 November that "at least 100 women were reported to have been raped by Bosnian Croat (HVO) soldiers between April and October 1993."<sup>10</sup>

#### AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL'S CONCERN ABOUT THE SAFETY OF CIVILIANS IN OTHER PARTS OF BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

Amnesty International remains concerned about the fate of the remaining Muslim population in Serb-occupied parts of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Although the majority of the Muslim and Croatian population was forcibly driven out of these areas<sup>11</sup>, some of them have remained, and are reportedly being victimized by local Bosnian Serb *de facto* authorities and by local Bosnian Serb armed gangs. Reports of abuses against these people received by Amnesty International generally concern areas around the Serb stronghold of Banja Luka, in the northern part of Bosnia-Herzegovina, and the town of

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>See "*Bosnia-Herzegovina : Gross abuses of basic human rights*", AI Index : EUR 63/01/93, October 1992, and "*Bosnia-Herzegovina : Rana u duši - A wound to the soul*", AI Index : EUR 63/03/93, January 1993. According to UNHCR sources, some 100,000 Muslims and Croats had left the Banja Luka region since the outbreak of civil conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina, while approximately 40,000 remained.

Bijeljina in the east, near the border with Serbia. There have been reports of torture, rape, arbitrary killings and expulsions of the non-Serbian population.

The British *Independent* of 9 September quoted a UNHCR report of 30 August, which said that Muslim residents of Banja Luka were almost daily subjected to beatings by Serbian police. The UNHCR reported that " ... people are forced to jump into the river (Vrbas) wearing their clothes. Others were forced to crawl on their hands and knees to pick up their wallets and documents while being kicked by police."

On 1 October a spokesman for the UNHCR said he had observed an increasing number of incidents, aimed at forcing the remaining Muslims and Croats to leave. He reported amongst other incidents the rape of two 65-year old Muslim women, and the attack on the home of an elderly Muslim couple, of which the 80-year-old woman was left stripped naked after being attacked and beaten by armed Serbian men. Local *de facto* Serb authorities in Banja Luka had told UNHCR representatives they were powerless, as they claimed that the attacks were carried out by outside extremists, acting on their own initiative.

The Bishop of Banja Luka, Monsignor Franjo Komarica alleged in October that a number of his priests had been kidnapped, and that at least one of them, *fra* Petar Drmić had been killed. When he raised this with the Bosnian Serb *de facto* authorities in the town, they replied that these incidents were not part of an official policy, alleging that they were done by individuals operating outside the Bosnian Serb army. No investigation into the incidents has taken place to date.

An unknown number of Muslim detainees, most of them captured in the early stage of the conflict in 1992, remain in Serbian detention camps, including the Batković camp near Bijeljina. On 2 November, Bosnian Prime Minister Haris Silajdžić and one of the representatives of the *de facto* Bosnian Serb authorities, Momčilo Krajišnik, agreed in principle to release some 950 prisoners held in their respective detention camps. An ICRC official, who had been present at the meeting, said afterwards that both sides were compiling, under ICRC guidance, lists of prisoners and were identifying prison camps that were to be emptied. They also tried to come to an understanding about the fate of missing prisoners on both sides. However, to Amnesty International's knowledge, releases have not yet taken place.

In late December, the ICRC estimated that the Serbs continued to hold around 450 Muslims detained in 15 camps, most of them in areas around the cities of Banja Luka and Sarajevo.

Amnesty International fears that further human rights abuses have occurred in the Bihać region in western Bosnia-Herzegovina. The situation in this region is now both

politically and militarily highly complex. The region has a mainly Muslim population, and since the outbreak of armed conflict has received some 35,000 displaced persons, most of them coming from Serb controlled areas around Banja Luka and Sanski Most in the summer of 1992. In return, most of the indigenous Serbs left Bihac and fled to Banja Luka at the same time. The Bihac area has strong local traditions and until recently had largely remained outside the conflict, under the semi-official leadership of a local industrialist, Fikret Abdić, who until October was one of members of the Bosnian Government Presidency. On 27 September, Fikret Abdić claimed Bihac to be the Autonomous Province of Western Bosnia-Herzegovina. President Izetbegović dismissed this declaration and deployed Bosnian Government forces there to force the region to return under the control of the Bosnian Government. At present, the area is roughly divided in two: the north being loyal to Fikret Abdić and the south being more influenced by the Bosnian Government led by President Alija Izetbegović. Bosnian Government soldiers have reportedly violated human rights in incidents of street violence and arrests. According to UNHCR estimates, some 200 political prisoners, including former local officials loyal to Fikret Abdić, have been imprisoned in southern Bihac. In mid-November Fikret Abdić called for a general mobilization in northern Bihac amid reports that a certain number of Bosnian Government soldiers had defected to his side. The ICRC estimated in December that both the Bosnian Government side and Fikret Abdić's forces had detained some 250 prisoners respectively.