

BOSNIA-HERCEGOVINA:

Abuses by Bosnian Croat and Muslim Forces in Central and Southwestern Bosnia-Herzegovina

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Introduction

All-out war broke out between the Bosnian Muslims and Croats in early May 1993 in central and southwestern Bosnia-Herzegovina. Both Croatian and Muslim forces¹ have been guilty of serious abuses -- they have deliberately executed civilians and disarmed combatants, arbitrarily arrested individuals belonging to the opposite ethnic group, mistreated prisoners in detention, and forced the displacement of tens -- possibly hundreds -- of thousands of persons. In April, Bosnian Croat forces in the Mostar and Stolac areas and Bosnian Muslim forces in the Konjic and Zenica areas began committing abuses against the civilian population. In early May, Bosnian Croat forces began their wave of abuses against Muslims living in western Herzegovina; Bosnian Muslim forces followed suit in June, when they launched a major offensive against HVO positions in central Bosnia. Neither the Bosnian Army nor the HVO command have taken serious steps to discipline their troops or to punish those soldiers who have perpetrated human rights abuses against civilians and disarmed combatants.

Helsinki Watch, a division of Human Rights Watch, welcomes an agreement reached between Bosnian President Alija Izetbegović and Croatian President Franjo Tudjman on September 14, requiring that both Bosnian government and Bosnian Croat authorities release all prisoners -- many of whom are civilians -- within a week. Helsinki Watch also welcomes an agreement by both sides to form working groups to safeguard respect for human rights in areas under their control and to develop confidence-building measures between the two parties.² Unfortunately, as this report goes to press, the fighting between Croat and Muslim forces in central Bosnia has yet to abate.

Helsinki Watch urges that those Bosnian Croats and Muslims guilty of human rights abuses in recent months be held accountable for their crimes. Our investigations of these crimes continue, and will be the subject of future reports. This newsletter summarizes some of the cases Helsinki Watch has documented in recent months; the detailed testimonies on which this report is based are held in the Helsinki Watch files.

Abuses by Bosnian Croat Forces

¹ The Croatian Defense Council (*Hrvatsko Vijeće Obrane* - HVO) is the military force of the Bosnian Croats and will be referred to by its Croatian acronym, HVO, hereinafter. Although Croats and Serbs continue to serve in the Bosnian Army, the military forces of the government are overwhelmingly Muslim, particularly in south-central Bosnia; we use the terms Bosnian Army and Bosnian Muslim forces interchangeably. Various Muslim paramilitary groups and at least one Croatian paramilitary force called the Croatian Defense Forces (*Hrvatske Obrambene Snage* - HOS) conduct military operations in conjunction with the Bosnian Army and HVO, respectively.

² Alan Riding, "Croats and Muslims Agree to Cease-Fire in Bosnia," *The New York Times*, September 15, 1993.

Summary Executions

Ahmići (Municipality of Vitez)

On April 16, HVO forces attacked the predominantly Muslim village of Ahmići, summarily executed scores of unarmed civilians and destroyed all the Muslim homes. A detailed investigation was conducted by the field staff of Tadeusz Mazowiecki, Special Rapporteur of the UN Commission on Human Rights, shortly after the massacre took place. According to the Special Rapporteur's report, 20 fleeing civilians were ambushed and shot at close range while others were summarily executed in their homes. The bodies of entire families were burnt beyond recognition. Of the 89 bodies that have been recovered from the village as of mid-May, most are those of elderly people, women, children and infants. All the homes belonging to Muslims in the village were burnt while the Croatian homes remained intact.³

Helsinki Watch spoke to Ivan Lučić, HVO's chief of security, in late August 1993 about the mass execution committed by their troops in Ahmići. Helsinki Watch representatives were told that one person was in custody and that an investigation was being conducted. Helsinki Watch continues to inquire about the status of the investigation, but has received no indication that further actions have been taken.

Further Allegations

Helsinki Watch also has received reports that Croatian forces summarily executed Muslims in Kakanj. Helsinki Watch representatives are currently investigating these allegations.

Forced Displacement, Arbitrary Arrest and Detention

Full-scale fighting between Bosnian Army and HVO forces in Mostar started on May 9. It appears that HVO forces orchestrated the attack and used it to justify the arbitrary arrest and detention of thousands of Muslim men and some women and children. Most of those arrested in May were taken into custody solely on the basis of their ethnic and religious -- not military -- affiliation.

Approximately 2,000 men, women and children were arbitrarily arrested in May in the Mostar area. In many cases, people were expelled from their homes and apartments by HVO soldiers, loaded on buses and taken to a detention center. The evictions and arrests appear to have been ordered by the HVO military police in Mostar. Similar evictions and arrests also took place in the Stolac area in April. Those arrested were detained at the heliodrom in Rodoč, on the outskirts of Mostar, and approximately 400 were held in the football stadium in the Velež section of Mostar. Some of those arrested in May were interrogated to determine whether they belonged to the Bosnian Army. To the best of Helsinki Watch's knowledge, no one was charged with a crime and the vast majority of those detained were civilians. Most women and children

³ See UN Commission on Human Rights, "Situation on Human Rights in the Territory of the Former Yugoslavia: Second periodic report on the situation of human rights in the territory of the former Yugoslavia submitted by Mr. Tadeusz Mazowiecki, Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights, pursuant to paragraph 32 of Commission resolution 1993/7 of 23 February 1993," E/CN.4/1994/4, May 19, 1993.

and some elderly men were released after two to three days in detention. Some men between the ages of 50 and 60 and some younger men were released after ten days. Other men of military age and some teenagers remain incarcerated while others have been exchanged for Croatian prisoners of war and civilians held by Muslim forces.

Prior to the outbreak of full-scale war between the Muslims and the Croats, some Muslims were members of the HVO, particularly in areas where the Muslims were in the minority. On June 30, during battles for the HVO-controlled village of Bijelo Polje and the northern barracks in Mostar, Muslim members of the HVO in Bijelo Polje mutinied and joined with the Bosnian Army forces. As a result, Bijelo Polje and the northern barracks fell to Bosnian Army forces. The mutiny of Muslim HVO soldiers in Bijelo Polje on June 30 and the launch of a Bosnian Army offensive in central Bosnia three weeks earlier resulted in a second wave of arrests of Muslims by HVO in late June throughout Croatian-controlled western Hercegovina.

In addition to the municipalities of Mostar and Stolac, HVO troops have forced the displacement of Muslims in the municipalities of Prozor, Kiseljak, Busovača, Čapljina, Vitez and in the HVO-controlled area of the Novi Travnik municipality. Most of those detained in May, June and thereafter were or remain imprisoned in detention centers at the Rodoč heliport and in the villages of Gabela and Dretelj in the Čapljina area.⁴

The Bosnian Croat authorities to whom Helsinki Watch spoke claimed not to know the fate of the detained and repatriated Muslims who remained in HVO custody. Helsinki Watch representatives were told that the Muslims would probably be exchanged for Croatian civilians and captured combatants held by the Bosnian Muslim forces. Such a practice amounts to hostage-taking by both sides.

Mistreatment in Detention

According to the UNHCR, as of August 20, Bosnian Croat forces are holding approximately 15,000 Muslims in detention camps and prisons in Grbavica, Dretelj, Stolac, Ljubuški, Gabela, Rodoč and several other places. After the first round of arrests in May, the ICRC and other international observers were allowed to visit detainees in Rodoč. However, HVO denied access to the ICRC and other relief agencies shortly thereafter. Negotiations to allow the ICRC to visit the HVO-controlled detention facilities commenced in late June and only in August and early September was the ICRC given access to detention facilities in the Čapljina and Mostar areas. The ICRC visited the Rodoč detention camp in August and registered 1,900 inmates. Although over 1,500 Muslim detainees were released from various detention centers controlled by HVO during the week of August 29,⁵ hundreds -- possibly thousands -- remain in detention.

Rodoč Heliport

Helsinki Watch representatives have visited the heliport in Rodoč, outside of Mostar, on several

⁴ For an account of the conditions in these detention camps, see relevant section below.

⁵ Amnesty International, Urgent Action Appeal 315/93, September 9, 1993.

occasions since the beginning of the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina in April 1992. During our most recent visit in August 1993, Helsinki Watch found that conditions in the prison had deteriorated. Overcrowding and malnutrition of the male detainees is evident and men are routinely taken to the front lines to dig trenches, fill sandbags and attend to similar chores in the direct line of fire.

Although common criminals and some HVO soldiers are detained in the prison for breaches of discipline, most of those incarcerated are Muslim men between the ages of 18 and 60. The men are held in the basement and on the first (i.e., ground) and second floors of the prison in rooms of varying sizes within the main building, most of which are overcrowded. At the time of Helsinki Watch's visit, the prisoners slept on beds or mattresses and had been given blankets. Other prisoners are held in adjacent structures of the main building, including the classrooms and gym.⁶

Most of those who are taken to the front lines to work do so against their will. However, because they receive larger portions of food when they do manual labor, some prisoners told Helsinki Watch representatives that they volunteer to work along the front line because they are hungry. According to the prisoners, at least four inmates have been wounded and two have been killed while working on the front lines. Prisoners reported having been taken to work along the front line in the Buna area near Mostar, including the village of Lakševine; the area between Blagaj and Bijelo Polje; on the Bulevar, which is one of the dividing lines between Bosnian Army and HVO forces in Mostar; along Šantićeva street in Mostar; on the Stotine mountain near Rodoč; near the pensioners home (i.e., *dom penzionera*) by the Hotel Lero; and to Mostarsko Blato.

Women prisoners are held on the third (i.e., top) floor of the main building of the Rodoč facility and appear to be better treated than the men. Those women interviewed by Helsinki Watch representatives did not report having been mistreated in any way nor had they witnessed other women being beaten or otherwise abused. One woman whose husband was detained in the basement was allowed to visit him.

Gabela and Dretelj

The Gabela and Dretelj detention camps near Čapljina were sealed off to outside observers until August and early September, respectively. Helsinki Watch was denied access to both camps when it requested permission to visit in August 1993. In early September, Bosnian Croat authorities released some prisoners and allowed foreign journalists, the ICRC and others to visit the Gabela and Dretelj detention centers.

Bosnian Croat authorities told Helsinki Watch representatives that approximately 1,500 men were detained in each camp. These officials admitted that conditions in the two detention facilities were not good and cited overcrowding as the main reason for the poor conditions.

While overcrowding is a serious problem, former detainees interviewed by Helsinki Watch representatives⁷ testified that prisoners were also physically abused. Former detainees interviewed by

⁶ The Mostar heliodrom was a former Yugoslav Army training center and school for prospective pilots.

⁷ Interviewed in Zagreb and in various refugee camps in Croatia in September 1993. In order to protect the witnesses,

Helsinki Watch representatives claim that those beaten in the camps were usually members of the Bosnian Army. Malnutrition and lack of hygiene also plague both detention facilities.

According to the former detainees interviewed by Helsinki Watch representatives, the Dretelj camp consists of five hangars which had been used to store fuel. According to the former detainees, one of the storage sheds (i.e., hangars) housed approximately 400 people. Another 270-square-meter shed housed about 540 prisoners.

Former detainees from Dretelj, a former Yugoslav military logistics base, told Helsinki Watch representatives that they were fed one meal daily, which usually consisted of a small portion of rice, beans or macaroni and a thin slice of bread. E.T., a 35-year-old driver from Čapljina, reported that his wife was allowed to bring him food while he was detained in Dretelj. In response to losses suffered by HVO forces in an area called Dubrave, prisoners in Dretelj were denied food and water between July 13 and 15. According to former detainees, the commander of the HVO military police in the area, Mr. Aničić, was in charge of the camp. Those interviewed by Helsinki Watch confirmed that conditions in Dretelj improved after Aničić was replaced in August by a prison director, Tomo Šakota. In particular, former inmates claimed that Šakota sought to prevent the beating of prisoners by HVO soldiers.

On September 1, approximately 350 prisoners were released from Dretelj.⁸ The ICRC registered approximately 1,200 Muslim prisoners in the Dretelj camp on September 6.⁹ However, 125 inmates may have been removed from the camp prior to the ICRC's visit.¹⁰

A.M., a 26-year-old carpenter from Čapljina and a recently released detainee from the Gabela camp, also a former Yugoslav Army logistics base, told Helsinki Watch representatives¹¹ that prisoners were housed in three large storage sheds. A.M. claimed that 20 to 30 Bosnian Army soldiers were detained in the same shed as he, which housed approximately 650 prisoners. According to the former prisoner, the Bosnian Army soldiers were taken out of the shed, beaten and subsequently returned to the hangar. The food served the prisoners in Gabela was similar to that served at the Rodoč heliodrom and the Dretelj camp – a small portion of beans or something warm and a small slice of bread. According to A.M., the Gabela prison was operated by an HVO military police officer named Boko Brevišić. The ICRC visited the Gabela camp in August and registered 1,100 people at the time.¹²

Helsinki Watch has omitted the locations of the refugee camps where the interviews took place. The names of the witnesses and the places of the interviews are kept in a secure area outside Helsinki Watch's office.

⁸ Amnesty International, Urgent Action Appeal 315/93, September 9, 1993.

⁹ International Committee of the Red Cross, "Conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina: ICRC Visits 4,200 Muslim Detainees Held by Croats," Communication to the Press, No. 93/29, September 7, 1993.

¹⁰ Amnesty International, Urgent Action Appeal 315/93, September 9, 1993.

¹¹ Interviewed in Zagreb, Croatia on September 13, 1993.

¹² International Committee of the Red Cross, "Conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina: ICRC Visits 4,200 Muslim Detainees Held by Croats," Communication to the Press, No. 93/29, September 7, 1993.

Obstruction of Humanitarian Aid

Mostar

For over two months, the Bosnian Croat authorities refused to allow humanitarian aid to reach the Muslim-controlled side of Mostar. A spokesperson for the Spanish battalion of the UNPROFOR mission in Medjugorje told Helsinki Watch representatives¹³ that Bosnian Croat authorities blocked relief supplies from entering the Muslim-controlled area of Mostar as an act of retaliation because the Bosnian Army had refused to allow HVO helicopters to evacuate Croats in serious need of medical care from a make-shift hospital in the besieged Croatian-controlled village of Nova Bila, near Travnik and Vitez.¹⁴ Helsinki Watch condemns the obstruction of humanitarian aid by any side in a conflict. The obstruction of aid to one side by a party to the conflict does not give the other party the right to deny aid in return.

On August 21, UN officials delivered one truckload of medicine to the Muslim-controlled sector of Mostar. On August 25, the US began air-dropping aid to the Muslim-held area of the city. It appears, however, that some of the aid landed in the Croatian-held part of the city or in sparsely inhabited areas to the north, and that some supplies landing in the Muslim sector of the city were difficult to reach due to HVO sniper fire.

Finally, on August 26th, Bosnian Croat authorities allowed a convoy of humanitarian aid to reach the Muslim quarter of Mostar but not without endless delays. A demonstration by displaced Croats from central Bosnia appears to have been organized by the Bosnian Croat authorities to harass the UN convoy carrying aid to the Muslims.¹⁵ Also, UN vehicles were searched for weapons in an apparent effort to delay the convoy.¹⁶

Fearing that the departure of the UN convoy would result in resumed HVO shelling of the Muslim quarter, residents in the Muslim-controlled sector blocked the UN armored personnel carriers and refused to allow UN personnel to leave the area. UNPROFOR's Chief of Civil Affairs, Cedric Thornberry, was among those prevented from leaving. Thornberry angrily protested that the residents of eastern Mostar were holding UN personnel "hostage" and threatened to stop all humanitarian aid to Bosnia unless the UN vehicles were allowed to pass.¹⁷

Two days later, on August 28th, several dozen UN workers and 28 trucks left Mostar after the UN

¹³ Interviewed in Medjugorje, municipality of Mostar, Bosnia-Herzegovina, on August 19, 1993.

¹⁴ See relevant section below.

¹⁵ John Pomfret, "UN Trucks Deliver Food to Mostar's Muslim Ghetto," *The Washington Post*, August 26, 1993.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Kurt Scharf, "Moslem Women and Children Stop UN Convoy Leaving," Associated Press, August 26, 1993, and Kim Murphy, "Muslims Block Convoy From Leaving," *The Los Angeles Times*, August 27, 1993.

guaranteed that soldiers from the Spanish battalion would remain in the Muslim-controlled sector as a deterrent against further attacks by the Bosnian Croats.

In addition to the obstruction of aid delivery, Bosnian Croats have shot and killed or wounded civilians trying to obtain water from a river in the Muslim-controlled section of Mostar. Due to the fighting in the city, the only source of water for the persons living in the Muslim-controlled part of Mostar is the Neretva River, which separates Bosnian Army and HVO troops in some areas. Sniping by HVO forces on the western side of the Neretva has impeded the ability of Muslims on the eastern side of the river to obtain water.

Near Novi Travnik

On June 10, HVO forces near Novi Travnik halted a 450-truck relief convoy taking supplies to the majority Muslim town of Tuzla. HVO attacked the convoy and shot seven Muslim drivers, reportedly in revenge for the recent capture of Travnik by Bosnian Army forces. The following day, HVO forces attacked the convoy again, killing two Muslim drivers, one at close range. Approximately 30 other Muslim drivers were captured and the convoy was plundered.¹⁸

Other Abuses

Bosnian Croat forces have destroyed and looted Muslim property in areas under their control. Harassment of Muslim residents and displaced persons who have been housed in shelters throughout western Hercegovina is particularly acute in Čapljina and Posušje. Croats displaced from central Bosnia by Bosnian Army forces have forcibly evicted Muslims living in western Hercegovina and have moved into their homes with the apparent acquiescence of the Bosnian Croat authorities.

To a certain extent, the level of violence against Muslims in areas that are not under attack depends on the willingness of the local authorities to impose law and order. According to UN field personnel, the local authorities in Ljubuški and Tomislavgrad have made efforts to protect the local Muslim population whereas those in Čapljina and Mostar have only exacerbated already tense relations between the Croats and Muslims in both municipalities.

The Role of the Government of the Republic of Croatia

In coordination with the Bosnian Croat authorities, the Croatian government has aided in both the forcible displacement and the refoulement and arbitrary arrest of Muslims in western Hercegovina. Hundreds of men have been released from detention centers in western Hercegovina and taken to the

¹⁸ Amnesty International Newsletter, "Bosnia-Hercegovina: Civilian Casualties Mount as War Rages On," August 1993, Volume XXIII, No. 8.

Republic of Croatia by HVO forces. The Croatian government has accepted the former Muslim detainees and most remain in refugee camps in Croatia. However, the Croatian government has not granted the former detainees refugee status. Rather, the former detainees have been granted temporary transit visas which require that they leave Croatia by a given date.

In the past, when Muslim refugees fled from Serbian-controlled areas of Bosnia, Croatia accepted the Muslims and granted them refugee status. Those who were offered placement in third countries -- usually former detention camp prisoners -- were given visas allowing them to transit Croatia. The Croatian government has accepted approximately 280,000 Bosnian refugees but, for social and economic reasons, claims that it can no longer accept any more refugees. While Helsinki Watch understands the burden that Croatia has been assuming, the Croatian government should not be assisting the HVO-organized deportations of Muslims from their homes in Croatian-controlled parts of Bosnia. Because most Muslims fear returning to HVO-controlled areas of Bosnia and because they have neither refugee or legal residency status in Croatia, the former detainees are forced to travel to third countries. Such policies by the Bosnian Croat authorities and the Croatian government has forced the flight of Muslims from Croatian-controlled areas of Bosnia and Croatia.

Helsinki Watch has also documented instances in which the government of the Republic of Croatia, paradoxically, has forcibly repatriated (i.e., refouled) Bosnian Muslims and Croats who have sought refuge or have been deported to Croatia. In most cases, those who were not registered as refugees, whose refugee status had expired and, in some cases, those with orderly refugee status were refouled to western Hercegovina. Bosnian Croats were then forced to join the HVO forces and the Bosnian Muslims were imprisoned. Helsinki Watch visited several such Muslims who had been refouled from Croatia at two sites in Tomislavgrad.¹⁹ Those interviewed claim not to have been mistreated while in detention but neither have they been charged with a crime.

On September 6, Croatian President Franjo Tudjman appealed to Bosnian Croat leader Mate Boban "to do all that is necessary ... to immediately ensure humane treatment of all detainees in the [HVO-controlled] detention camps," to allow the ICRC access to such camps and to allow free passage of all convoys delivering humanitarian aid.²⁰ While Helsinki Watch acknowledges this expression of concern by President Tudjman, we believe that the government of the Republic of Croatia -- which supplies economic, political and military support to the Bosnian Croats -- should exert stronger and continued pressure on the Bosnian Croat military and civilian authorities to ensure the latter's compliance with international law.

Abuses by Bosnian Government and Muslim Forces

Summary Executions

Trusina (Municipality of Konjic)

¹⁹ Interviewed by Helsinki Watch representatives on August 16, 1993.

²⁰ Amnesty International Newsletter, "Bosnia-Hercegovina: Civilian Casualties Mount as War Rages On," August 1993, Volume XXIII, No. 8. See also Letter to Mate Boban from Croatian President Franjo Tudjman, Zagreb, September 6, 1993.

According to witnesses interviewed by Helsinki Watch, approximately 50 families lived in the village of Trusina. Roughly half the inhabitants were Muslims and the other half were Croats. According to former residents, armed conflict between the Muslims and Croats broke out in late March in the nearby village of Seonice. The shooting lasted for about two days and then the situation remained quiet for roughly 20 days. On April 16, 1993, Bosnian government and Muslim paramilitary forces attacked the village of Trusina and a battle between Muslim and Croatian forces ensued.

During the battle, between five and ten Croatian women and approximately ten children were captured by the Muslim troops. According to J.L.,²¹ a mother from Trusina, she and another captive were told to go to the main road in the village to collect weapons that had been left behind by retreating HVO forces, despite the fact that they were in the front line of fire. The weapons were then given to the Muslim soldiers. The captives were taken by approximately 60 Muslim soldiers to a home on the periphery of the village, to an area known as Gaj, where they saw disarmed HVO soldiers who had been captured by the Muslim forces. The women and children were told to stand behind a barn and they then heard volleys of bullets being shot off. After the shooting ceased, the Muslim soldiers summoned the women and children to the front of the barn, where they saw that five men had been summarily executed. Some of those executed were male relatives of the captured women and children. According to J.L., another man had been executed near the road, not far from the barn.

The women and children were then taken to a house, where they were robbed of their personal belongings and money. J.L. claims that the Muslim soldiers ordered the women and children to carry crates of ammunition and weapons to Muslim military positions in the village. The captives were eventually allowed to go home but they were told that if they tried to flee the area, they would be shot. The Muslim soldiers – who were not residents of the village – eventually left the area and about 20 Croats fled Trusina soon thereafter.

Doljani (Municipality of Jablanica)

During a battle between Muslim and Croatian soldiers in the village of Doljani on July 27, about five armed and uniformed HVO soldiers, an armed male civilian and five unarmed civilians fled the village. En route, they reached a meadow, where they heard someone yell, ordering them to lie on the ground. According to K.S., a 56 year-old housewife from Doljani,²² as soon as the group dropped to the ground, they were shot at from two opposite directions, from a distance of approximately 20 meters on both sides. Both K.S. and J.T.,²³ another witness who was present during the shooting, reported to Helsinki Watch representatives that the Bosnian Croat combatants did not return fire nor did they provoke the attack in any way.

²¹ Interviewed by Helsinki Watch representatives on June 25, 1993, in the village of Ljuti Dolac, municipality of Široki Brijeg, Bosnia-Herzegovina.

²² Interviewed by Helsinki Watch representatives on August 24, 1993 in the village of Otok, municipality of Sinj, Croatia.

²³ Interviewed by Helsinki Watch representatives on August 17, 1993, in Medjugorje, municipality of Mostar, Bosnia-Herzegovina.

After the shooting stopped, one of the civilians fled and managed to escape. Someone then ordered the wounded to remain on the ground. Those who were not wounded were told to stand up. Two unarmed women, the previously armed civilian male and Željko Miškić, a wounded HVO soldier, stood up. According to K.S., those who remained on the ground were wounded and one man, Nedeljko Soldo, had been killed. A woman who had been shot in the leg was among the wounded. K.S. claimed that others had been wounded in the head or stomach.

Approximately 20 Muslim soldiers then approached the Croats. A Muslim soldier recognized Željko Miškić, the wounded HVO soldier, ordered him to stay behind while the two women and the civilian man were taken to a house by two of the Muslim soldiers, where they were imprisoned on the ground floor. A wounded HVO soldier was already being detained in the house when the three civilians arrived and the four remained incarcerated in the same room.

The wounded who remained in the meadow were later found dead and the corpse of Željko Miškić reportedly was found with his hands tied behind his back and disemboweled, suggesting that some of the wounded may have been tortured and summarily executed.

Helsinki Watch also interviewed A.S., a 41 year-old woman,²⁴ who hid in a pantry with her sister and nephew during the fighting in Doljani. When Muslim soldiers entered their house, they demanded that they open the door to the pantry. When they did not comply, the soldiers kicked in the door and sprayed a volley of bullets into the pantry, killing the witness's sister. According to A.S., no effort was made to determine who was inside the pantry before the soldiers opened fire.

Konjic

Fighting between Muslims and Croats erupted in the Konjic area in mid-April 1993. During the attacks, most of the non-Muslim population in the area fled to the HVO-controlled village of Donje Selo, near the town of Konjic. During the April 1993 fighting, Donje Selo was populated primarily by Serbs who had been displaced from their homes in 1992 and by Croats who had been displaced by the recent fighting between Muslims and Croats in the surrounding villages of Podorašac, Ovčari, Vrbići, Galjevo and Repovci.

According to Dragan, a 43-year-old man,²⁵ battles for Donje Selo lasted for two days, at which point Muslim forces issued an ultimatum that all those who remained in Donje Selo were to come to the village of Homolje. After the local representative complained that the elderly could not endure the 30-minute walk to Homolje, Muslim forces came to Donje Selo, lined people up against a wall, robbed them of their personal belongings and money and threatened to kill them. According to the witness, a Serbian man between the ages of 70 and 80 was beaten.

²⁴ Interviewed on August 24, 1993, in the village of Otok, municipality of Sinj, Croatia.

²⁵ Interviewed by Helsinki Watch representatives on June 27, 1993, in Čitluk, Bosnia-Herzegovina. The witness asked that his identity not be disclosed and the name used here is a pseudonym.

According to Dragan, the men were divided from the women and taken toward Homolje, where they spent the night. En route to Homolje, in the village of Breber, approximately 50 more soldiers joined the 15 Muslim soldiers accompanying the male prisoners. The column of men then stopped along the road and the Serbian prisoners were ordered to step forward and between nine and 12 men complied. The rest of the men were told to cross over to the other side of the road and to lie down facing away from the road. The Serbs who stepped forward were taken to the other side of the road. Dragan then reported hearing screams and shooting. Because the prisoners on the other side of the road were not allowed to look up or behind them, they could not confirm if all the Serbian prisoners had been killed or wounded. Dragan testified that the men were never seen again and he presumed that they had all been executed.

Miletići (Municipality of Zenica)

UNHCR officials have reported that, after a brief battle between Muslim irregular and Croatian forces on April 24 in the hamlet of Miletići, Muslim forces tortured and then killed four Croatian civilians they had detained in the village, 25 kilometers northwest of Zenica, near the village of Grahovići.²⁶ Reuters reported that five Croats were killed and that one of the victims had been blown up by a hand grenade while he was tied to a chair.²⁷ Reportedly, four of the victims were members of the same family.²⁸

Uzdol (East of Prozor)

European monitors confirmed that members of the Bosnian Army were responsible for the killing of over 35 Croats -- most of them civilians -- in the village of Uzdol on September 14.²⁹ Helsinki Watch plans to investigate the circumstances of the killings in the near future.

Further Allegations

Helsinki Watch also has received reports that Muslim forces have summarily executed Croats in the village of Maljine (municipality of Travnik) and in the village of Kiseljak (municipality of Žepče). Helsinki Watch plans to investigate these allegations in the near future.

Forced Displacement

²⁶ Amnesty International, Urgent Action, EUR 43/12/93, May 14, 1993.

²⁷ Douglas Hamilton, "Some Go Home, Some Flee in Chaos of Bosnian War," Reuters Information Services, Inc., April 30, 1993.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ David B. Ottaway, "U.N. Troops Move Between Croats and Serbs," *The Washington Post* September 16, 1993.

Since early June, a Bosnian government offensive and subsequent fighting between Muslims and Croats in central Bosnia has forced the displacement of Croats living in Bugojno, Kakanj, Fojnica, Travnik and Zenica and parts of Novi Travnik, Gornji Vakuf, Jablanica and Konjic. Bosnian Croat officials estimate that over 120,000 Croats have been displaced as a result of the fighting with Bosnian government forces. In the villages surrounding the town of Travnik and in several other instances, HVO forces organized the evacuation of the Croatian population when they could no longer retain control over a village or town. Helsinki Watch interviewed scores of Croats who had been displaced as a result of the fighting in central Bosnia, particularly from Travnik, Bugojno, Jablanica, Konjic and elsewhere. All claimed they approved of HVO's decision to evacuate Croatian civilians and most believed that they would have been the target of reprisals by Muslim forces had they stayed in a given area after its fall to Bosnian Army troops.

It is not possible to determine to what extent the fears of the displaced Croats are legitimate and to what extent they had been propagated and are being reinforced by propaganda routinely broadcast over the Croatian-language media. Due to continued fighting, Helsinki Watch has not been able to visit many of the towns in central Bosnia in which Bosnian Army forces have assumed complete control. Nor have UN personnel present in the field thoroughly investigated the situation of the Croatian minority in Muslim-controlled areas of Konjic, Jablanica, Travnik and, to a lesser extent, Zenica. Further investigations need to be conducted to determine whether the displaced Croats' fear of persecution were in fact realized.

Although HVO organized the evacuation of Croatian civilians from some areas of conflict, Helsinki Watch has documented cases in which Croatian civilians have been forcibly expelled from their homes by Muslim irregular and Bosnian government forces. According N.M.,³⁰ a woman from the city of Travnik, Muslim troops forcibly entered her apartment six times. On one occasion, they ransacked her apartment. On another, they demanded the keys to her apartment and she and her husband were ordered to leave immediately. The couple fled to their neighbor's house and called the police to report the break-in. The police answered that they would send a patrol but no one arrived. The couple called the police a second time and were told again that a patrol would be dispatched, but the police never arrived. The couple chose to flee Travnik, fearing for their lives. The woman claimed that four Croatian families living in her apartment building were all expelled in a similar fashion.

On the basis of interviews conducted with displaced Croats and UN and relief personnel, Helsinki Watch has reason to believe that Croats remaining in the Muslim-controlled municipalities of Konjic and Jablanica are being arbitrarily arrested, detained and harassed by Muslim military and civilian authorities. Helsinki Watch will continue its efforts to visit these areas to inquire into the status of Croats living in Muslim-controlled regions of central Bosnia.

Mistreatment in Detention

According to figures released by the ICRC on September 8, Bosnian Government forces are detaining approximately 650 Serbs and 579 Croats in 24 detention centers in areas under their control.³¹

³⁰ Interviewed by Helsinki Watch representatives on June 26, 1993 in Ljubuški, Bosnia-Herzegovina.

³¹ Amnesty International, Urgent Action Appeal, No. 318/93, September 10, 1993.

However, the ICRC has not visited all detention centers operated by Bosnian government forces, and the number of prisoners held by Muslim forces is presumed to be higher.

Mostar

Croatian prisoners held by Muslim forces in the Muslim-controlled area of Mostar are forced to work on the front lines. According to a US journalist who visited the Muslim-controlled side of the city in late August, Croatian prisoners were forced to clean the Bosnian Army headquarters in the Hotel Ruža in the Muslim-controlled area of Mostar, which is near the confrontation line with HVO forces. The bodies of three Croats that had been killed while working on the front line lay in the morgue at the time of the journalist's visit.

The ICRC last visited the Muslim-operated prison in Mostar on September 8 and registered over 100 detainees.³²

Konjic

The sports hall in Konjic has long been a place of detention operated by Bosnian Muslim soldiers. According to Dragan,³³ a 43-year-old former detainee interviewed by Helsinki Watch representatives, Croats from the Konjic area and approximately 80 Serbs who had been captured during fighting between Serbian forces in 1992 are detained in the sports hall. According to the former detainee, prisoners were beaten daily by guards. Usually, a person was taken from the room and beaten in an unlighted area. According to Dragan, prisoners were forced to dig trenches for Bosnian Army soldiers. Initially, prisoners were fed an eighth of a loaf of bread and some rice daily. Dragan claimed that half a soldiers' meal was used to feed eight prisoners. Later, family members who remained in the area were allowed to bring food to the prisoners.

Dragan also claimed that, on several occasions, prisoners were used as human shields to deter Croatian forces from firing on Muslim positions in the area. According to Dragan, once fighting between Muslim and Croatian forces commenced, Muslim forces took between 20 and 100 prisoners from the sports hall and forced them to form a line, with their hands behind their heads, in the direct line of fire.

Dragan also claimed that, during the course of two days, blood was taken from between 50 and 60 prisoners in the Konjic sports hall. The prisoners did not volunteer to donate their blood. According to Dragan, a doctor and a medical technician took the blood from the inmates but both appeared to be doing

³² International Committee of the Red Cross, "Bosnia-Herzegovina: ICRC Delegates Visit Detainees on Left Bank," Communication to the Press, No. 93/30, September 10, 1993.

³³ Interviewed on June 27, 1993, in Čitluk, Bosnia-Herzegovina. The witness asked that his identity not be disclosed and the name used here is a pseudonym.

so under duress from the Muslim soldiers and guards.

Obstruction of Humanitarian Aid

Nova Bila

The Croatian-controlled village of Nova Bila, situated between Travnik and Vitez, has been encircled and besieged by Bosnian Muslim forces for over two months. A make-shift hospital has been established in the basement of a Franciscan monastery in Nova Bila to treat wounded civilians and combatants. As of August 18, Bosnian Croat officials in the village claim that 81 wounded are being cared for in the hospital. Of the 81, 40 are seriously wounded and require urgent medical and surgical attention which the make-shift hospital cannot provide because it allegedly operates without water or electricity and limited medical supplies.

Bosnian Muslim forces have prevented humanitarian aid from reaching the village and have refused to allow the evacuation of patients from the Nova Bila hospital. According to Dr. Drago Dzambas, the head of the medical center in Novi Travnik, the Muslim forces' refusal to allow medical evacuations from the Nova Bila hospital has led to the deaths of 18 patients, including children. HVO forces claim that their refusal to allow humanitarian aid to reach the Muslim-controlled side of Mostar is in retaliation for the Muslim blockade of Nova Bila.³⁴

In early September, after Bosnian Croat forces allowed humanitarian aid to reach the Muslim-held area of Mostar, Bosnian government troops allowed medical evacuations from the Nova Bila hospital.

Other Abuses

According to testimony taken by Helsinki Watch, Muslim and Bosnian government forces have shot at individuals and columns of civilians as they fled from the villages around Travnik, from the village of Doljani in the Jablanica municipality and from the village of Donje Selo in the Konjic municipality. Muslim forces also have burned and looted villages near Konjic, particularly in and around the area known as Klis.

Conclusions

The increase in abuses by Bosnian Croat and Muslim troops may be due, at least in part, to the international community's apathy toward violations perpetrated by Serbian forces over the past two years. Because little if anything was been done to halt and punish Serbian forces for abuses associated with the

³⁴ For a summary of the Bosnian Croats' obstruction of humanitarian aid in Mostar and elsewhere, refer to the relevant section above.

policy of "ethnic cleansing,"³⁵ both Bosnian Muslim and Croat troops have seen fit to adopt similar measures in pursuit of their military and political aims.

Abuses perpetrated by Bosnian Croat forces have been documented by the foreign press and UN personnel, as well as by Helsinki Watch. The international community has pressured both Bosnian Croat officials and the Republic of Croatia, the patron of HVO forces in Bosnia. Helsinki Watch believes that such pressure should continue on both the Bosnian Croats and the government of Croatian President Franjo Tudjman to ensure that the September 14 agreement between Presidents Tudjman and Izetbegović to release prisoners and safeguard human rights be enforced and that Croatian forces in Bosnia-Herzegovina abide by their obligations under international humanitarian law.

The behavior of Bosnian Muslim troops has not been fully investigated by international observers to date. This is largely because fighting between Bosnian Croat and Muslim troops has impeded access to some Muslim-controlled areas. Helsinki Watch continues to document abuses perpetrated by Bosnian government forces but acknowledges the need for further investigations of allegations of abuse. Abuses perpetrated by Bosnian Muslim forces, such as those documented in this report, should be condemned by the international community.

Helsinki Watch calls on the Bosnian government and the Bosnian Croat authorities to apprehend and prosecute all those guilty of human rights abuses and violations of the rules of war. Moreover, we call on the government of the Republic of Croatia to refrain from assisting in the forcible displacement of Muslims from Croatian-controlled areas of Bosnia and to use its influence with the Bosnian Croats to demand that they respect human rights in areas under their control. Helsinki Watch calls on the Defense Ministry of the Republic of Croatia and the HVO military command to ensure that stronger and more organized controls of HVO troop behavior be instituted. Helsinki Watch also calls on the command of the various corps of the Bosnian Army to take steps to ensure that all Muslim forces fighting on behalf of the Bosnian government be placed under a strict command structure, so as to prevent future crimes against civilians and disarmed combatants in areas under Bosnian government control.

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Helsinki Watch was established in 1978 to monitor domestic and international compliance with the human rights provisions of the 1975 Helsinki Accords. The chair of Helsinki Watch is Jonathan Fanton and the vice chair is Alice Henkin. Jeri Laber is executive director; Lois Whitman is deputy director; Holly Cartner and Julie Mertus are counsel; Erika Dailey, Rachel Denber, Ivana Nizich and Christopher Panico are research associates; and Christina Derry, Ivan Lupis, Alexander Petrov and Isabelle Tin-Aung are associates.

Helsinki Watch is a division of Human Rights Watch, which includes Africa Watch, Americas Watch, Asia Watch, and Middle East Watch. The chair of Human Rights Watch is Robert L. Bernstein and the vice chair is Adrian W. DeWind. Kenneth Roth is acting executive director; Holly J. Burkhalter is Washington director; Gara LaMarche is associate director; Ellen Lutz is California director; Susan Osnos is press

³⁵ For accounts of abuses perpetrated by Bosnian Serb forces, see Helsinki Watch, *War Crimes in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Volume I*, August 1992, and *War Crimes in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Volume II*, April 1993.

director; Jemera Rone is counsel; Michal Longfelder is development director; Dorothy Q. Thomas is Women's Rights Project director; Joanna Weschler is Prison Project director; Kenneth Anderson is Arms Project director.

Helsinki Watch is affiliated with the International Helsinki Federation in Vienna, Austria.