

NORTHWESTERN BOSNIA

Human Rights Abuses during a Cease-Fire and Peace Negotiations

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SUMMARY

Areas of northwestern Bosnia under Bosnian Serb control were the site of a brutal endgame of "ethnic cleansing," murder, and rape, even as a cease-fire and the Dayton Peace Accord were being negotiated. From August through November 1995, more than 6,000 non-Serbs were systematically and brutally driven from their homes. At least two thousand non-Serb draft-age males were separated from their families and taken away to unknown locations. Many are still missing; some are believed dead, others remain in detention and forced labor. According to reports of witnesses, Bosnian Serb forces were assisted in attacks against non-Serbs by the particularly brutal paramilitary group led by Željko Ražnatović, a.k.a "Arkan"—a force sponsored and sheltered by the government of Serbia.

Today, as the troops of the NATO-led Implementation Force (IFOR) are deployed pursuant to the Dayton Accord, IFOR commanders have been reluctant to station troops in areas such as northwestern Bosnia, despite the recent history of abuse. In this area, where British commanders are the principal IFOR authority, international troops insist on focusing almost exclusively on the military front line, even though most abuses of civilians have been committed away from military confrontation lines. The Banja Luka area — and most of Bosnian Serb-held areas of northwestern Bosnia — are among the most dangerous in the country for non-Serbs. Banja Luka has been referred to as the "heart of darkness" by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Although this region has largely been spared battles between armed forces, severe human rights abuses have been committed with impunity against non-Serbs since the beginning of the Bosnian war in 1992. Yet British officials have indicated to Human Rights Watch that IFOR will probably keep only a token presence in Banja Luka because it is distant from the "zone of separation" dividing the adversarial armies.

Although the Dayton agreement authorizes IFOR to support the work of the mission's civilian component, including agencies tasked with human rights protection and refugee repatriation, IFOR contributing countries — particularly the United States, Britain and France — are focusing primarily on monitoring the cease-fire and separating the Bosnian Serb and Bosnian government armies and the Bosnian Croat militia. Preventing renewed attacks on non-combatants, let alone bringing to justice those who organized the killing of the recent past, has been a low priority.

A similar hands-off approach toward serious abuses played a large role in the failure of the U.N. peacekeeping mission in Bosnia. Civilian aid workers of the UNHCR, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and other agencies were attacked and unable to protect non-Serbs in the region due, in part, to the unwillingness of the U.N. to support and assist their work. Similar inaction by IFOR would almost certainly doom the current peace agreement as repressive forces come to recognize that little stands in the way of renewed slaughter or abuses of civilians.

Human Rights Watch/Helsinki does not deny that military issues must be the main priority of military entities like IFOR. However, a strong military presence is essential in deterring abuses and helping civilian agents to protect human rights, conduct police patrols, deliver humanitarian aid, elect representatives who will not advocate violence as a solution to problems, and build the rule of law. Throughout the war, civilians in Bosnia-Herzegovina repeatedly told Human Rights Watch/Helsinki representatives that international presence is not enough — a strong, proactive presence is necessary if an atmosphere of trust and security between the former warring communities is to be created. This atmosphere is critical to

successful repatriation, reconciliation, and for a lasting peace. IFOR's reluctance to deploy substantial numbers of troops outside the "zone of separation" will hinder civilian humanitarian efforts in northwestern Bosnia and elsewhere. IFOR's support to civilian efforts to ensure the safety of those who have survived the war, including refugees who seek to repatriate, and for those minorities who wish to remain in their homes, is a central part of the Dayton agreement. Such a proactive IFOR role is, indeed, fundamental to the success of the current peace process.

There are already many serious challenges to the Dayton agreement which provide important opportunities for IFOR and the international community to demonstrate concern for human rights and convey the intention to ensure compliance with the agreement. Minorities remaining in majority areas throughout the region still fear they will be forced from their homes, despite the Dayton Agreement — or perhaps because of it. On January 25, in the village of Majdan, near the town of Mrkonjić Grad, Croat troops arrived with twenty trucks and began the forced relocation of hundreds of Croat civilians to the town of Glamoč. Majdan is slated to come under Bosnian Serb control under the Dayton Agreement. The forced displacement and political resettlement of civilians, in this case conducted by soldiers of their own ethnic group, is only one example of the kind of abuses civilians have continued to experience despite the Dayton accords. In Sanski Most, Bosnian government authorities recently held Serb civilians, some of them elderly, for exchange. In Banja Luka, hundreds of men remain in forced labor or are otherwise unaccounted for. The absence of a strong international response to such events risks renewal of the recent ethnic slaughter described in these pages.

In November 1995, Human Rights Watch/Helsinki investigators interviewed persons from nine towns and villages in and near the Sanski Most region in northwestern Bosnia. All gave similar accounts of recent "ethnic cleansing" in their areas. The pattern of expulsion and disappearance in the Sanski Most area was virtually identical to that in the other eight cities, towns and villages described in this report. This latest wave of "ethnic cleansing" began following offensives in August and September 1995 against rebel Serb-held areas of the Krajina region of Croatia and western Bosnia. These offensives, led by the Croatian and Bosnian Armies and the Bosnian Croat militia, displaced over 250,000 Serbs. In retaliation, Bosnian Serb military and civilian authorities — and paramilitary groups from Serbia proper — intensified their campaign of terror against Muslims and Croats in the municipalities of Banja Luka, Prijedor, Sanski Most and other areas of northwestern Bosnia, leaving a trail of mass-abductions and scores of civilian corpses.

Soldiers typically arrived in a town or village with buses and trucks and went house to house, ordering people from their homes. Soldiers began at one end of the town and worked their way toward the other. Under threat of death, residents were ordered to give up their money and jewelry. Witnesses reported that the troops who evicted them were well-trained, efficient, brutal, and very interested in robbing everyone. Many townspeople stated that the soldiers were not local Serbs, although local Serbs accompanied them around the area and, according to townspeople, showed the non-local troops where Muslims and Croats lived. In some cases, Serbs recently displaced from the Krajina area — but more often Serbs recently displaced from western Bosnia — would occupy the homes of those who had been expelled.

As the non-Serbian population was being ousted, women, children and the elderly were detained in various locations and then expelled to Bosnian government-controlled areas. Men of military age were generally separated from the women and children and told that they were being sent to perform forced labor duties for the Bosnian Serb military, usually along the

front lines. The whereabouts of many of these men remains unknown. In some cases, men were also detained with the women, children and elderly, but they were removed from the buses before reaching Bosnian government-controlled territory and subsequently "disappeared." Those remaining on the buses were frequently robbed of all their belongings. In many instances, detainees were beaten, tortured, and raped. Some were beaten to death or summarily executed.

Witnesses often referred to the soldiers committing the abuses as "*Arkanovci*," referring to the so-called "Tigers" paramilitary group led by Željko Ražnatović, whose *nom de guerre* is "Arkan." These paramilitary units are based in Serbia proper, were armed and trained by the Interior Ministry of Serbia in the early 1990s, and are shielded by the current Serbian government of Slobodan Milošević. In many cases, witnesses' descriptions of the troops' insignia, uniform and general appearance resemble those of Arkan's paramilitaries. Moreover, both local and Western media reports indicate that Arkan arrived in the Bosanska Krajina area some time in August 1995.

According to evidence and information gathered by Human Rights Watch/Helsinki representatives and presented in this report, possibly over one hundred civilians were summarily executed *en masse* in the region just prior to the final signing of the Dayton peace agreement. Furthermore, in mid-January 1996, European Union monitors and Bosnian investigators identified six mass graves in northwestern Bosnia containing the bodies of approximately 240 suspected victims of "ethnic cleansing" by Serbian forces in 1992, all within fifteen kilometers of Sanski Most. Of additional great concern are reports indicating that Bosnian Serb forces have begun to exhume and destroy mass graves in northwestern Bosnia.

The *New York Times* of January 11, 1996 quoted Lt. Col. Benjamin Barry, the commander of the British forces whose headquarters are located a mile away from a mine in which corpses were being destroyed. He said, "Our job is to separate forces, not look for mass graves. . . . It would be a diversion of soldiers from our main goal." Despite overwhelming evidence that mass grave sites are being tampered with in Bosnian Serb-held territories — including the region around Srebrenica — IFOR troops have refused to step in and halt the destruction of evidence.

Human Rights Watch/Helsinki is deeply concerned at the reluctance of IFOR to uphold a central part of its mandate by providing the full and necessary support for the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, including by securing the sites of mass graves and locating and detaining indicted war criminals. The Dayton agreement and the Security Council resolution implementing the agreement give an important role to IFOR in supporting the tribunal's work. This role reflects the importance of establishing the rule of law to the success of the peace process. IFOR's refusal to accept this role sends the message that there is no price to be paid for the slaughter of civilians, at least so long as it takes place away from military front lines. That message puts the peace process at risk by encouraging Bosnian factions to take the law into their own hands and to resume the cycle of ethnic violence and revenge that has fueled the Bosnian conflict. This cycle will not be broken until the rule of law is established and the authors of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity are brought to justice.

RECOMMENDATIONS

With a view to establishing the rule of law and respect for human rights in northwestern Bosnia, Human Rights Watch/Helsinki offers the following recommendations to IFOR and its civilian component:

- Begin the immediate collection of information on the sites of suspected mass graves and deploy IFOR troops to secure the sites.
- Deploy additional troops to areas outside the zone of separation and maintain a strong military presence in Bosnian Serb-held areas, not just along the cease-fire line and the Muslim-Croat federation. This way, IFOR will be able to monitor and through its presence, protect the human rights of civilians, particularly minorities, displaced persons and returning refugees. Furthermore, IFOR, together with the civilian component established by the Dayton agreement, will play a vital role in facilitating inter-ethnic reconciliation and the re-establishment of civil society — a goal that the civilian component is unlikely to achieve on its own.
- Restore *complete* freedom of movement: To ensure safety for all civilians who chose to travel through former 'enemy territories' and facilitate the voluntary repatriation of the displaced, IFOR should guarantee safe passage in high-risk areas. The very presence of IFOR will help to mitigate human rights abuses, reminding the local authorities of their obligations and the fact that they are being monitored.
- Establish an effective standard operating procedure for addressing human rights violations that occur in front of IFOR troops so that they do not become silent witnesses to human rights abuses. During the U.N.'s mission in the former Yugoslavia, civil police assigned to UNPROFOR conducted investigations of human rights abuses but had no effective procedure or channel for reporting human rights violations.
- Undertake an active intelligence effort to identify the location of indicted war criminals and initiate an active education effort by providing all IFOR troops with photographs and descriptions of indicted war criminals so troops will recognize those under indictment when encountered.

Furthermore,

- Because the ombudsman and the International Police Task Force (IPTF) commissioner are to report to the High Representative, Carl Bildt — the highest ranking civilian official under the terms of the Dayton accord — must publicly and forcefully protest any and all human rights abuses in the area. He must, according to the Dayton agreement, as a last resort seek punitive action against any party that refuses to correct its abusive behavior or to cooperate with international efforts to prosecute war crimes as established in Security Council Resolution 1022, the Dayton agreement and the London Document.
- A large and qualified human rights and police monitoring mission must be deployed **without delay** in Bosnian Serb-controlled areas of northwestern Bosnia. To this end, the human rights ombudswoman envisioned in the Dayton agreement must be provided with a staff and budget large enough to enable her thoroughly to investigate abuses brought to her attention. The human rights monitoring mission is strongly

encouraged to intervene in cases; monitoring and reporting are not enough. IPTF delineated in the Dayton accord must be similarly staffed and funded.

- The fate of the disappeared from northern Bosnia — be they those taken for forced labor, detention, arbitrary arrest or execution — must be immediately determined. A positive identification of those executed or otherwise killed must be made available to the victims' families.
- Unimpeded visits to all reported centers of detention should be granted immediately to representatives of the ICRC and human rights organizations. Lists of prisoners should be made public in order to confirm the fate of missing persons.
- Those Serbs who speak publicly against the positions of Ratko Mladić and Radovan Karadžić must be afforded the same rights and protection as all others susceptible to abuse because of their religious, ethnic, national or political affiliation. Serbs opposed to the current regime of the *Republika Srpska* must be allowed to campaign all Bosnian Serb-held areas prior to the holding of elections in those areas, as specified by the Dayton agreement.
- A genuinely free media must be established to counter the propaganda that currently pervades all areas of Bosnia-Herzegovina, including Bosnian Serb-held areas. The lack of free exchange of unbiased information has kept the element of hostility and intolerance alive in the minds of many civilians, soldiers and politicians. Efforts should be made by the international community to facilitate a free exchange of information that is not controlled by any ruling party.

Finally,

- The Security Council should delay the lifting of sanctions against the Bosnian Serbs until they fulfill the basic conditions set out in resolution 1022, which requires full compliance with all provisions of the peace accord. In particular, Human Rights Watch believes that sanctions should not be lifted until the Bosnian Serbs demonstrate the following: Cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia; the release of all prisoners, including combatants and civilians held in detention or forced labor, which is prohibited under the agreement; freedom of movement, including the right to return; full and unimpeded access for humanitarian and human rights organizations; the protection of ethnic and/or minority populations.

BACKGROUND

In early September 1995, as the leaders of the former Yugoslavia (Bosnian Serbs,¹ Bosnian Croats and the Bosnian, Croatian and Yugoslav²) met in Geneva to create the

¹ Human Rights Watch/Helsinki uses the term "Bosnian Serbs" in this report to describe forces loyal to rebel Serb leader, Radovan Karadžić, of the self-proclaimed Bosnian Serb state, *Republika Srpska*. Scores of Serbs oppose the policies of Karadžić and his troops led by Gen. Ratko Mladić, but unless otherwise indicated, the use of the term "Bosnian Serb" in this report does not refer to Serbian opponents of the *Republika Srpska* regime.

² "Yugoslav government" here refers to the government of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY), now comprised of

framework what became the U.S.-brokered Dayton peace agreement, thousands of Muslims³ and Croats were being expelled or disappeared from Bosnian Serb-held territory. During the period between August and December, local extremist Serbs, Serbs displaced from Croatia and western Bosnia, and persons connected with the authorities of the self-declared Bosnian Serb "state," known as Republika Srpska carried out systematic "ethnic cleansing"⁴ of non-Serbs in the Bosanska Krajina area in northwestern Bosnia.⁵ Paramilitaries from Serbia proper were also involved, as non-Serbs were detained, robbed of their possessions, beaten, raped and expelled from the region. An estimated 2,000 people were separated from their families; many are still missing.

Montenegro and Serbia (including the provinces of Vojvodina and Kosovo). The FRY was represented at the peace talks by Serbian President Slobodan Milošević. Milošević also spoke on behalf of the Bosnian Serb delegation at the Dayton peace negotiations.

³ For purposes of clarity, "Muslim(s)" will be used to identify those now referred to as Bošnjak or Bošnjaci (plural) - pronounced in English as Bosniak(s) - in Bosnia-Herzegovina. "Bošnjak" is a term which is accepted by the government of Bosnia-Herzegovina to define the population generally known as "Muslim(s)," and which has become their official nationality title. Their current status as "Muslims" is viewed by some as an inaccurate label because it defines a people's nationality solely on the basis of their religious belief. Furthermore, the term "Muslim(s)" used as a nationality title is disapproved of by many countries in which Islam is the dominant religion, as well as by many "Muslims" of Bosnia-Herzegovina themselves.

⁴ In this and past reports concerning the former Yugoslavia, Human Rights Watch/Helsinki has used the term "ethnic cleansing" to refer to a premeditated plan by local, regional and higher authorities to capture or consolidate control over territory by forcibly displacing or killing members of the "enemy" ethnic group. The public nature of the abuses, the regular frequency with which they take place and the impunity with which they are conducted also indicate a systematic policy of "ethnic cleansing." When we refer to the "forcible displacement" of a population in connection with "ethnic cleansing," we refer to involuntary displacement caused by the authorities' planned deportation, expulsion, eviction and/or terrorization or marginalization to such a level as to force one's flight from an area. The flight of a civilian population during hostilities can properly be referred to as "forcible displacement" but, in and of itself, cannot be considered "ethnic cleansing." However, deliberate and sustained attacks against civilian targets during hostilities could be considered a method through which to effect the policy of "ethnic cleansing." For a discussion of the relevant laws of war defining "forced displacement," see Helsinki Watch, *War Crimes in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Volume II*, (New York: Human Rights Watch, April 1993), pp. 10-13.

⁵ Bosanska Krajina generally includes the municipalities of Bosanska Dubica, Bosanska Gradiška, Bosanski Novi, Prijedor, Bosanska Krupa, Sanski Most, Ključ, Bosanski Petrovac, Drvar, Bosansko Grahovo, Glamoč, Mrkonjić Grad, Jajce, Skender Vakuf, Kotor Varoš, Banja Luka, Čelinac, Laktaši, Prnjavor and Srbac.

In Geneva, the negotiating parties agreed, and were therefore obligated, to respect the human rights of all individuals — particularly members of minority groups — and to facilitate and ensure the safety of those persons who wished to return to areas from which they were expelled or displaced as a result of the nearly four-year-old war. Despite these commitments, figures of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), between August and September approximately 22,055 non-Serbs were expelled from the Bosanska Krajina region, primarily from the Banja Luka area.⁶ Of these, 14,092 were Croat, 5,924 were Muslim, and thirty-nine were of other nationalities. By October, another 2,000 non-Serbs had been expelled. By November, more than 6,000 Muslims had crossed over into Muslim-Croat federation territory, while over 2,000 were still missing. Altogether, UNHCR estimates that of the total non-Serb population of 536,549 in the region prior to the war,⁷ only 9,000 Croats and 13,000 Muslims remain.

ABUSES IN THE SANSKI MOST AREA

Summary Executions⁸

The predominantly Croatian-populated village of Sasina was captured by Bosnian Army troops on October 10, 1995. It had previously been under Bosnian Serb control but many of its original residents had either left or been expelled. The village is approximately three kilometers from Sanski Most and currently lies on the front line dividing Bosnian Army from Bosnian Serb troops. Human Rights Watch/Helsinki interviewed four individuals who provided testimony indicating that persons in Sasina were summarily executed during the early morning hours of September 21 or 22, 1995. Two of the witnesses heard explosions or gunfire associated with the execution, and three of the witnesses reported seeing body parts protruding from the soil and other evidence of execution at the grave site.⁹ Bosnian Serb soldiers appear to have summarily executed the victims before they retreated from the area. The identity and number of victims remain unclear. However, it appears that Bosnian Serb authorities arrested Muslims from the surrounding villages and possibly Croats remaining in the village and then summarily executed them in Sasina.

⁶ For further information, see Human Rights Watch/Helsinki, *Bosnia-Herzegovina: "Ethnic Cleansing" Continues In Northern Bosnia*, (New York; Human Rights Watch, November 1994) and Human Rights Watch/Helsinki, *War Crimes in Bosnia-Herzegovina: U.N. Cease-Fire Won't Help Banja Luka*, (New York, Human Rights Watch, June 1994).

⁷ According to the 1991 population census.

⁸ On November 15, 1995, Human Rights Watch/Helsinki representatives were shown official files, including photographs, which showed in detail the location of corpses and their condition as found in the Sanski Most region and during identification procedures after the Bosnian government had taken control of the area from Bosnian Serb forces. A total of thirty-eight bodies were reportedly found above the ground (i.e., they had not been buried). In some of the cases, the nature of the victims' wounds (e.g., bullet holes in the back of the head) indicated that the victims may have been summarily executed, but further investigation is required to determine whether violations of the rules of war took place in each specific case.

⁹ Human Rights Watch/Helsinki representatives tried to view the site on two occasions in mid- and late November but were denied access both times by members of the first corps of the Bosnian Army, who claimed that the area was too close to the front line and therefore dangerous. On one occasion when we tried to gain access at the entrance to the village, the first corps commander was exiting Sasina with a washing machine in the back of his van, apparently having just looted someone's home. He told one of his soldiers not to allow us to enter the village and sped away.

According to a man interviewed by Human Rights Watch/Helsinki representatives in the village of Poljak, one kilometer from Sasina:¹⁰

People were killed the night of September 21-22. That night, buses took people to Banja Luka. I was standing in the forest; I was hiding in order to evade being taken for forced labor duty. A car, two buses and one truck went up the hill. I could not see how many people were on the buses. I could see no writing on the buses. At first I thought they were soldiers, because soldiers in buses were passing all the time. The buses stopped about one kilometer from me, near the church. I didn't see [anything], because it was dark then. When they stopped, I heard gunfire and a few automatic weapons, and I heard voices of men and women screaming, "Why are you killing all of us?" and "Don't kill us!" After the shooting, I heard two or three detonations, as if mines were exploding. I heard these detonations three or four times. I heard single gunshots. Then it was quiet, except I heard a machine going back and forth. I didn't hear any voices I just heard the screaming before. The shooting happened between midnight and 3:00 a.m. The buses stayed until the morning and then left. They [the victims] were probably transported from the other villages; some of our people are missing from Betonirka. We don't know the identity of those killed in Sasina.

¹⁰ Interviewed by Human Rights Watch/Helsinki representatives in Poljak, Bosnia-Herzegovina, November 16, 1995. The man's brother had been disappeared.

A woman who lived near the massacre site told Human Rights Watch/Helsinki representatives that she had been awakened by the detonations but was afraid to leave her house to investigate what had happened after the massacre.¹¹ The "machine" to which the witness refers above appears to have been a bulldozer or tractor, possibly used to level the earth over the bodies. A foreign journalist who visited the site of the grave on October 11 told Human Rights Watch/Helsinki representatives that she saw wide tracks at the site.¹² "I saw some tracks which were wide — quite wide, like this [She spreads her hands to indicate a width of approximately three feet.] — John Deere-type things."¹³

This journalist followed the Fifth Corps of the Bosnian Army as it advanced on and captured Sanski Most. She then accompanied Bosnian military police to view the grave site at dawn on October 11. The journalist described to Human Rights Watch/Helsinki representatives what she saw at the grave site:

I saw a mound of earth. I saw two decomposing skulls with worms in the eyeballs — there were heads separated from bodies which were decomposing. There were definitely women in the grave. I saw one woman with her bra showing — she was wearing a tunic [and] her breast and belly were sticking out of the earth. You could see the stomachs of some people. There was one old woman; there were some arms [sticking out of the earth]. I didn't see any children. The bodies were obviously freshly killed — there were bodies lying with just some dirt over them. I would guess there were about 148 to 150 people. There was one little strip of land just full of blood — [as if it had been] an execution plot. There was caked blood everywhere. The woman's body that I looked at closely was just drenched in blood. One soldier found part of a handle of a big knife and another found a blade; it looked as if some of them had been stabbed instead of shot. ... There were some bodies off in the bushes as well — one man had bullet holes in the back of his head.

O.H., a fifty-year-old woman from Poljak,¹⁴ stated that she, too, had visited the grave site and had seen a woman's hand with manicured nails and long blond hair sticking out of the ground.

"Ethnic Cleansing" of Villages and Towns in the Sanski Most Area

¹¹ Interviewed by Human Rights Watch/Helsinki representatives in Poljak, Bosnia-Herzegovina, November 16, 1995.

¹² Interviewed by Human Rights Watch/Helsinki representatives, en route to the village of Jasenica from Sanski Most, Bosnia-Herzegovina, November 16, 1995.

¹³ John Deere is a U.S.-based company that produces heavy agricultural equipment. The witness is referring to a type of tractor commonly used for agricultural purposes.

¹⁴ Interview by Human Rights Watch/Helsinki representatives, Poljak, Bosnia-Herzegovina, November 16, 1995.

According to most witnesses interviewed by Human Rights Watch/Helsinki, the fifth Kozarac brigade¹⁵ of the Bosnian Serb Army came to the Sanski Most area from the Prijedor region on September 17. They took a number of men for forced labor duty, and those men's whereabouts remain unknown. Several days after the Kozarac brigade arrived, troops identified as Arkan's paramilitary units by witnesses also arrived in the area.¹⁶ According to F.Z.,¹⁷ a witness interviewed by Human Rights Watch/Helsinki representatives, Arkan's paramilitaries terrorized non-Serbs in several villages in the Sanski Most area, including the village of Kijevo, Čaplje and Tomina, Sana [Sanski Most], Kusmovci, Donji Kamengrad, Gornji Kamengrad, Naprelja, Fajtovci, and Gorce.

Many non-Serbian women and children and some men were taken from villages in the Sanski Most area and held in the village of Šehovci, later to be deported to Bosnian government-held areas. The whereabouts of much of the male population from the Sanski Most area are unknown.

Stari Majdan

N.Q.¹⁸ is a thirty-four-year-old woman from Stari Majdan. Her thirty-four-year-old husband, B.Q., worked in the mine at Omarksa before the war. N.Q. was abused and then raped numerous times by paramilitary soldiers she identified as belonging to Arkan's forces. Her husband was killed by those same forces. She reported that:

It was the middle of September, Muslim men were not living in their houses but hiding in the woods while Muslim women hid in houses next to the woods. When the Serbian army retreated from Bihać, they came through Sanski Most. People were frightened. About a week before the 25th of

¹⁵ Kozarac is a town in the municipality of Prijedor. Once a predominantly Muslim town, it was brutally "cleansed" by Bosnian Serb forces in 1992 and many of its inhabitants were taken to detention camps, where they were bestially abused. In general, a brigade is often named after the hometown of many of its soldiers. The brigade referred to here may comprise Serbs who had lived in Kozarac (albeit there were few) or it may have been responsible for the "cleansing" of Kozarac; Human Rights Watch/Helsinki does not retain evidence about the exact identities of the soldiers in this brigade. (For an account of the fall of Kozarac, see Helsinki Watch, *War Crimes in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Volume II*, (New York: Human Rights Watch, April 1993), pp. 61-73.)

¹⁶ Several points should be made about the identification and level of activity of Serbian paramilitary groups, most of whom are based in Serbia proper. First, the ability to distinguish between the various groups has become blurred: Although many Bosnian Serb combatants wear uniforms belonging to the Bosnian Serb Army (BSA), others wear uniforms that have no insignia, and their affiliation is not always clear. Also, from the outset of the war, the BSA has substantially relied on Serbia proper for manpower, and many soldiers from the former JNA simply crossed into Bosnia and donned BSA uniforms. Finally, some soldiers wear insignia belonging to one group but identify themselves as members of another group. There are two reasons why local Bosnian Serbs identify themselves as members of certain Serbian-based paramilitary groups. First, these paramilitary units are widely known for their brutality and ruthlessness, and local Serbian combatants frequently assume these identities to evoke terror among the non-Serbian population. Secondly, some paramilitary commanders — including Arkan — have been exalted at various times to "hero" status by segments of the Serbian media and, therefore, identification with such men may be viewed as honorable and patriotic. However, many witnesses interviewed by Human Rights Watch/Helsinki representatives stated that Serbs from Serbia proper took part in the "ethnic cleansing" campaign because they recognized Serbian accents spoken by many of the soldiers. To date, regional accents and local dialects remain the strongest evidence used to pinpoint the origin of a person in the former Yugoslavia. One Serbian soldier even told a witness that he was from Peć - a city in the region of Kosovo, which is one of the power bases for Arkan's paramilitary forces.

¹⁷ Interviewed by Human Rights Watch/Helsinki representatives, Čaplje, November 16, 1995. The witness chose not to give her name, and the name used here is a pseudonym.

¹⁸ Interviewed by Human Rights Watch/Helsinki representatives, Bosnia-Herzegovina, November 1995, location withheld at witness's request.

September, all the Serbian residents began leaving our village because the media said that the Bosnian Army was on the outskirts of Sanski Most.

Our neighbors were leaving, and they asked us to say good-bye to them. I went out with my husband and kids. My husband was standing on the street with some soldiers I didn't know. Those soldiers asked where the house of B.Q. [her husband] was situated. My husband gave the soldiers cigarettes and didn't let them know that it was he. He asked why they were looking for B.Q., and they said a Serbian woman at the outskirts of the city had told them he had to be killed, that he was a nationalist. Since these soldiers were beyond our house, my husband told them it was near the end of the village. The soldiers then came to our Serbian neighbors and asked if my husband was a "brother Serb." The neighbor said no, he was a Muslim. I heard all of this. The Serbian neighbor was married to a Croatian woman; he claimed that he was a handicapped war veteran. He was frightened for himself - he was afraid they would find out he was lying about his being handicapped. The Croatian woman told us to run away because the Serbs would kill us.

The following afternoon at four o'clock - it was Tuesday and my husband had already left for the woods - I was having lunch [at the house near the woods] when two special force policemen from Banja Luka arrived. They swore and screamed, asking "Why did you leave your houses!?" There were fifteen to twenty people at that house on the edge of the woods — all women and children. They told us to return to our houses and that no one would harm us. They told us that Arkan's people were coming to re-establish law and order. They knew we were all Muslims and that this was a Muslim village. They told us they were to round up and catch any Muslims who were of military age. One of those policemen said they had to catch my husband. They didn't know I was his wife. The policeman said my husband was the man who hated Serbs the most. "We are going to cut him alive," they told us. "He has a radio, and is connected with the Fifth Corps [of the Bosnian Army, which was advancing on the area]."¹⁹ My kids started to cry because they heard their father's name in the conversation. The Serbian soldiers still did not know the man they were looking for was the boys' father, and they said they would not harm children, and they left the house.

Because she was the wife of an accused, N.Q. did not want to put the rest of the people in the house in danger and sought shelter in her grandmother's house, which was on the opposite side of the village. During her walk across town she passed twenty of Arkan's soldiers who surrounded a Muslim house full of women and children and demanded to know where the men were hiding. N.Q. continued on her way. According to N.Q.:

¹⁹ A segment of the Army of Bosnia-Herzegovina (AbiH) based in Bihać led by Gen. Atif Dudaković. For three years the Fifth Corps was surrounded and besieged in the so-called "United Nations designated safe area" of Bihać by Bosnian Serb forces aided by equipment and troops from Serbia proper, by Serbian forces from the once self-declared "Republic of Krajina," and by rebel-Muslim forces led by Fikret Abdić. In early August 1995, with the assistance of the Croatian Army (HV) and Bosnian Croat forces (HVO), the Fifth Corps was able to break the siege of Bihać and link their territories with the rest of the Muslim-Croat Federation in central Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Then I used a back road on a small hill. At the bottom of the hill, I encountered more soldiers. One said, "Don't shoot. It's a woman and children." They asked my nationality; I said I was Muslim. They ordered me to go to the main square. When I came to the square, most of the non-Serbian villagers were there. Other soldiers were bringing people to the square at the same time. They lined up the men on one side of the square and women and children on the other side. They managed to catch approximately ten men, most of whom were covered in blood. They were the only men in the square.

N.Q., her children and others who had been rounded up in the square were taken to an elementary school. N.Q. was raped, beaten and threatened with more torture while in the school. According to N.Q.:

They took all of us, including the men, to the primary school and made us sit in the same classroom; however, the men had to sit in front of a blackboard, and the rest of us sat in chairs around the room.

The soldiers were already beating the men when one of the officials entered. He asked where B.Q.'s wife was. I said that was me. He asked where my husband was, and I told him I didn't know. "How could you be his wife and not know where he is? How could a husband leave, and not tell his wife where he was going?" They took me out of the classroom after which one soldier took me into another classroom, switched off the lights, took his gun, put it to my head and raped me. He then told me to go to my kids and left the room. I was on my way out of the classroom, when another soldier took me and raped me too. I was there for three days and three nights; the kids were screaming; I didn't sleep or eat or drink. The soldiers asked me questions all the time. They told me my husband had a radio and was in contact with the Bosnian Army. I was brutally threatened with torture if he didn't show up. They repeated again that they would cut him up alive.

The military-aged men were taken to another classroom to which I was also brought. All of them were covered in blood. They were barely breathing, and the only thing left in them was their souls, that was all. . . . After those three days and three nights, a Serb told us they were taking us all to the front lines toward Bihać: "You are going to your people." Some asked to go home to get their belongings, but they were not allowed to, and we left without documents, without anything. Those men from the classroom were taken to Keraterm, Betonirka in Sanski Most, Sanakeram [detention centers] and a few were sent for forced labor duties.

N.Q. was then transported to Podviđići, a Serbian village on the front line. She was left on the road next to a Serbian cemetery. The soldiers told the civilians that a group of Serbs were going to arrive in two hours in order to transport them to Bosnian government-controlled territory. But the group ended up staying there for six days. It rained, and only a few people had blankets. The [Serbian] residents had retreated since the area was often shelled. There were only three or four elderly Serbian people left, and the rest were Serbian soldiers who expected the Bosnian Army to come through soon. While N.Q. was there, Arkan's troops arrived: she described how all the soldiers had shaved heads, waterproof and camouflage uniforms, AK47s [semi-automatic and/or automatic rifles]; they wore caps, not

berets and had an insignia on their sleeves which depicted a tiger and read: "Serbian Voluntary Guards" — insignia that, indeed, is associated with Arkan's men.

On the third day, N.Q., three other women, and an old man were taken back to her village, where they saw the mutilated body of N.Q.'s husband. According to N.Q.:

By the time we were taken to the primary school in my village, I didn't feel anything anymore, I didn't have any emotions. They ordered me to look across the road. There, my husband's body was lying on the ground covered with a blanket. My husband's body was the only one on the ground in front of the school. I recognized his body since he was a tall man - one meter and eighty centimeters. I also recognized his boots. They asked me if it was my husband. I replied that it was. They asked me if I wanted to see him. I said no. But they ordered me to take the blanket off the body. I walked slowly, took the blanket off and saw my husband's body, all covered in blood. His whole body was cut up. His eyes were gouged out. His head was cut. He had a rope around his chest. They had put a rope around him, driven a car and dragged him. When I uncovered him, they said if I cried, I would be lying next to him. "Is he pretty to you?" they asked. I said he was.

The soldiers also took the three woman and the old man to identify N.Q.'s husband's body. The elderly man was beaten on the road, and then the soldiers took them all back to the school. N.Q. described how they continued to beat the old man in the corridor [of the school] and how they took the women to the classrooms and beat them one by one with wooden batons. The soldier who had taken a liking to N.Q.'s son took her hand and told her to go with him to a neighboring classroom. The soldier told N.Q. that she had no chance to survive. According to N.Q.:

In those minutes, all I thought about was what will happen to my children. When I saw my husband's body, the soldiers told me that they would not kill my kids because children of nationalists should be left alive so that they would suffer all their lives. That, they said, would be the worst punishment for them. The soldier told me to tell them whatever I knew, if not for myself, then for my kids. That was the only way I would be able to survive. Then we got into a car. He said he would show me the place where they found my husband. It was in front of our house. They spotted my husband in the shell of a neighboring house which was destroyed. The soldiers threw a few hand grenades at him, and when he jumped out of the house, they captured him and tortured him. They put a rope around him and dragged him all the way to the school by car — 300 or 400 meters. He died in that garden in front of the school. My husband's blood-covered jacket was in front of the house where they caught him.

. . . A military chief asked me how I felt now that my husband has been killed and added that he didn't feel sorrow for him. He told me that I wouldn't be killed and that I was lucky that he had arrived. His name is Elvis Šonjević from Peć, Kosovo; he is twenty-six years old.²⁰ He told me

²⁰ Peć is a city in the once-autonomous region of Kosovo now under Serbian control. Arkan uses the Serbian minority in Kosovo as a base of support for not only his political agenda but for recruitment for his paramilitary band "Tigers."

that they [his men] are all Arkan's people. He said, "We are cold-blooded murderers. I have sixty-eight murders behind me, but there is something about you which I can't figure out and I can't get myself to harm you." All of Arkan's people are no older than twenty-six years old; most are twenty-one, twenty-two years old. He also told me how he carried out "ethnic cleansing" in Bosanski Novi. The school was full of Arkan's people because Arkan was in Sanski Most. He told me that he would take me to the school and in the morning I would see my kids. "Whatever happens to the rest of those seventy or so people we have in captivity, that will happen to you too. Either you'll be killed or you will be exchanged." He took me back to the school and ordered my release. No one was to touch me, he said.

But one soldier I had never seen before asked who I was. I replied that I was the wife of the man lying in front of the school. He took me to a house and raped me and then returned me to the school. Two women who I saw earlier when I was released were now covered in blood. They beat a man because he had kids in Travnik who were in the Bosnian Army. They took him to the next classroom, and they beat him, and he screamed. Then they brought him to our classroom again, and he couldn't stand up. They picked him up by his shirt, but he couldn't stand; he kept on falling. One soldier ordered that he be turned on his side so he wouldn't swallow his tongue and said, "We need him." I was then taken to the headmaster's office. The chief was there, and ten or fifteen soldiers were standing around. They told me not to worry, that I would go as soon as transportation would be found. During the night, my husband's body lay in the garden, and I heard them screaming in the corridor, "That dog is to be buried! That dog stinks!"

N.Q. continued:

Later, a guard came and told me to go to my kids. Before I left the school, my husband's body was taken with the corpse of one of the ladies covered in blood; they had beaten her to death. . . . Then a large truck arrived, and they said we were to be transported to Stara Rijeka, a deserted Croatian village. Since all of us knew the road to Stara Rijeka, we immediately saw that we were not heading in that direction. After a while we saw that we were on our way toward Sanski Most. The truck stopped in Šehovci, and the driver pulled back the tarpaulin and told us that our lives were in our hands and demanded 500 German marks. Šehovci was full of women, children and elderly people. It was a collective center for non-Serbian civilians. We ended up staying there for twelve days while Serbian soldiers robbed and raped people. When I left on October 7, we traveled for twenty-four hours. I had a small bag with the kids' wardrobe that had been given to me by the people in Šehovci and five German marks in my pocket. During the journey, soldiers continued taking money and robbing people. What we had was taken. A small bag. They announced that the last checkpoint was customs and told us to give them everything we had. They wanted my wallet, and my son Haris cried again. He told them I didn't have a wallet, and the soldier said, "Who trained the kid to cry like that?"

Sanski Most

Edin,²¹ a Muslim resident of Sanski Most, who often had to respond for forced labor duty on a regular basis, was severely beaten in late 1995. When the Bosnian Army was approaching Sanski Most in late September and early October, Edin and his wife were taken to the village of Šehovci, as were others from the Sanski Most municipality. Edin described the expulsion from his home and his trip from Sanski Most to Šehovci:

When we were expelled from our house, my wife moved me to my neighbor's house because I was ill. Serbs were not even waiting for our houses to be unlocked; they were breaking into houses. Every twenty meters en route to Šehovci, Arkan's people were standing with their neat haircuts and uniforms; they were guards. They were insulting people. [They had] Serbian accents; they were not Bosnian Serbs but Serbs [from Serbia proper]. As we passed the bridge, two [Serbian soldiers] were standing there, and one asked me if I was a Muslim. I had a bag on my shoulder, and I answered "Yes," and he hit me with his gun, but I had the bag on my shoulder so I didn't feel it. They were dividing some men from the line [of people proceeding toward Šehovci]. They even took three mentally retarded men. That happened at the site of the old hotel. It was so scary to hear the screaming of the Muslims in the warehouse and the garden of the old hotel. I just wanted to pass; each step lasted a year. I expected them to do the same to me.

I.B., a fifty-one-year-old Muslim woman from Sanski Most,²² explained her expulsion from her home:

September 16th was the first time we heard about an offensive by the Bosnian Army. They [Serbian authorities] sent papers to all the men ordering them to go and dig trenches. When they came for my husband, he hid upstairs. I told them he was in a diabetic coma. Arkan's people arrived on the 18th or 19th of September; we saw the news on television. Two men came to my door, but the chain on the door protected us. Arkan's people always came in two's with one local person. If they knew about anyone whose relatives were in the Bosnian Army, they took the family to Šehovci. Relatives of my husband, including my husband's brother, were taken, and we don't know where they are; all of them were men — just one woman was taken. We don't know why they took her; she was paying money to protect her family. Everything that Arkan's people did was with the help of the local police. They showed them the houses to go to.

Arkan's soldiers started to expel people from Sanski Most using big trucks. On my street, two men in uniforms were ringing my door, but I didn't open it. Then they were banging on the door. I jumped from the window, and one of my Serbian friends went to my house to see who was at my door. A man told me then that I had to leave for Šehovci.

²¹ Interviewed by Human Rights Watch/Helsinki representatives in Sanski Most, Bosnia-Herzegovina, November 1995.

²² Interviewed by Human Rights Watch/Helsinki representatives in Sanski Most, Bosnia-Herzegovina, November 13, 1995.
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Two of P.P.'s sons and her husband were taken away by Serbian soldiers in Sanski Most. P.P.²³ recounted their abduction and her flight from her home:

It was September when Arkan's people arrived. On a Thursday, around 11:00 a.m. while we were drinking coffee, three men entered the house. They asked for identification cards. They were looking for weapons and money. They proceeded to beat me; I was hit on the head. But my husband got it worse. He was covered in blood. They were beating my husband with three pistols. I gave them my money, and they stopped. They counted the money and left the house. My husband gave me my medicine²⁴ and I just lay down for a few minutes.

Three different men returned to their home and took her husband. According to P.P.:

Three men — these were different men — called my husband's nickname and asked him to identify himself. My husband has diabetes and can't hear, so I told them that he's the one. They grabbed him, and he begged, "Brothers, please let me go." They told him they were not his brothers and cursed his mother. They took him away in a car. All of us — my daughter-in-law and her kids — walked until 10:30 in the evening searching for him.

At the time of the interview, P.P.'s husband was still missing.

F.F.,²⁵ a retired sixty-year-old woman, witnessed how her twenty-five-year-old son-in-law — who worked as a forced laborer for the Serbs — was abducted by Arkan's soldiers after they were expelled from their house:

In October, the Serbs rounded us up. They came to the house, told us to pick up our things in five minutes and to leave the house. We had to go to Šehovci by foot. On the way to the village, some buses with Arkan's soldiers stopped, and they took my son-in-law who is from Sarajevo. My son-in-law was on a bicycle. He just put the bicycle down and told his wife to try to find her way to Sarajevo. Some of the soldiers had short hair. Some of them had berets; some didn't. I think about ten people were prisoners inside the bus. Half the bus was crowded with Serbian soldiers. This thought will haunt me for the rest of my life.

Kijevo

²³ Interviewed by Human Rights Watch/Helsinki representatives in Bosnia-Herzegovina, November 1995.

²⁴ The witness told Human Rights Watch/Helsinki representatives that she had heart disease.

²⁵ Interviewed by Human Rights Watch/Helsinki representatives in Bosnia-Herzegovina, November 1995.

Human Rights Watch/Helsinki representatives visited the village of Kijevo, near Sanski Most, on November 15, 1995. According to A.L.,²⁶ a fifty-year-old woman who was in the village prior to its capture by the Bosnian Army, approximately 250 people remained in the village when a group of Serbian soldiers arrived in Kijevo. The witness recounted the treatment of her family and other residents of the village in recent weeks:

We lived about thirty years in this house. . . . My brother was also taken in September [1995] — I don't know when exactly. His name is Nedžad Kurbegović, and he was born in 1939. They put Serbs in his house and took his house and car. He lived in Sana [Sanski Most]. My mother was expelled from Sana too. My brother's wife and my mother cry all the time.

We left Kijevo on Tuesday, September 19. Cetniks²⁷ came here and asked for gold and money. They took my daughter-in-law and me behind our house and asked us for money. We gave them 300 German marks. Three Cetniks came in regular uniforms. When they asked for the money, one of them took a knife and held it to my neck. They were about twenty-five to thirty years old, and they made me take my clothes off to check to see if I had any more money. I had a lot of gold; I gave it all to them, because if I didn't, they would have killed me.

We heard the trucks arrive, but we didn't know what was happening. The whole thing was organized by a man named Mićo Krunić; he was the chief of everything — responsible for the taking of gold and money. Some people paid 2,000 German marks to stay alive. A car came [and the driver of the car spoke to] the driver of the truck. Some of the mothers had hid their money or jewelry with their children, but after they were threatened they took it from the children because they said they would kill all of us. The [Serbs] came with a big truck from *Agrokomerc*.²⁸ They put all the people on the truck. They had one big *šleper* [a large truck with a cab and an eighteen-meter bed] and a truck which was of normal size. The *Agrokomerc* truck was yellow, and the other was a greenish-gray army truck. The truck was right in front of my house. The men, women, and children were all put on the truck. The driver of the truck told me to get inside and tell everyone to give all their money or gold or they would kill all of us. This all started at about 7:00 in the morning.

²⁶ The witness chose not to disclose her name and the name used here is a pseudonym.

²⁷ During the Second World War, the Četniks called for the restoration of the Serbian monarchy and the creation of a Greater Serbia. They fought pro-Nazi Ustaše forces, Tito's communist partisans and at times with and against the Axis powers. They were especially brutal in Bosnia-Herzegovina, where they carried out large-scale massacres against the Muslim and to some extent Croat populations. Muslims, Croats and some Serbs opposed to their policies commonly refer to Bosnian Serb military and Serbian paramilitary forces currently engaged in the Bosnian war as "Četniks." Some Serbian combatants vehemently reject the label "Četnik," claiming they are merely defenders of their people and their land and that they are not extremists. Others, such as paramilitary units loyal to the Serbian Radical Party, commonly refer to themselves as Četniks.

²⁸ *Agrokomerc* was a farming collective operated by Fikret Abdić, the rebel Muslim leader in the Bijać pocket who aligned himself with rebel Serbian forces in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia against the Bosnian government. During the 1980s, *Agrokomerc* was a profitable institution that employed a large part of the population of the town of Velika Kladuša.

Later, they stopped the truck twenty kilometers from here and took my son — who is twenty-two years old — off and beat him with a baton made of wood on his head and hands and everywhere. He was calling, “Mother, mother, please help me,” and I was crying; I could do nothing. The Četniks said, “Shut your Balija²⁹ mother up,” and one cocked his gun. I could do nothing. They took him away, and I didn’t see him for eighteen days. They took him to Sanski Most to a garage with about twenty people inside.[It was called] the Nikola Bunda garage.³⁰ About forty men from the village were taken.³¹

T.E., a sixty-five-year-old man from Kijevo,³² was also expelled from his home. According to T.E.:

They would not let anyone out of the house or they would shoot them. That morning my wife and I were at our house. The outside doors were locked so that no one could break in. I heard a voice around 6:00 a.m. that said, “Open the door.” They were Četniks at the door. When they told me to open the door I was afraid to open it, so they broke the window and came in. They asked me why I didn’t open the door. I told them I wasn’t sure I heard someone at the door. There were five of them in the house, but there were many more outside. They wore the same camouflage uniforms and wore caps — like the old Yugoslav Army caps with the sign of the Četniks on it. They told my wife and me to get out of the house. They told us to get in a big truck, and they picked up all the Muslims from the village.

Poljak

The village of Poljak is located approximately three kilometers outside Sanski Most, and was predominantly populated by Croats. According to O.H., a fifty-year-old woman from Poljak,³³ four busloads of Serbian soldiers arrived in the village in early September or October.³⁴ O.H. recounted the activity of Serbian forces in the area in recent months:

²⁹ A derogatory term for Muslims. Some Serbs also refer to Bosnian Muslims as “Turks,” associating Muslims with the Ottoman rulers who reigned over most of Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina for approximately five centuries.

³⁰ The garage may also have been known as Betonirka, a complex of three garages on the outskirts of Sanski Most. According to the witness, men were mistreated and at least one person was killed while detained in the garage. Human Rights Watch/Helsinki representatives visited the site to which the witness referred, and saw three small garages, each measuring about thirteen feet by twenty feet. Clothing and shoes were strewn everywhere within the garages, some jackets were hanging on the walls, and some blankets were on the floor. It appears that persons were, in fact, detained in the garages.

³¹ According to the witness, about thirty men had been taken for forced labor earlier and were not present in the village.

³² Interviewed by Human Rights Watch/Helsinki representatives in Zenica, Bosnia-Herzegovina, November 20, 1995.

³³ See footnote 14.

³⁴ The witness claimed that the buses arrived in September but it appears from her testimony that she was referring to the month of October.

The Cetniks came here with two brigades — about 240 men. The fifth Kozarac brigade was one, and someone said Arkan's soldiers were here, but I didn't see them, so I don't know. [The soldiers] wore camouflage uniforms. They had a type of bandana around their heads — like a headband — and the same thing around their upper arms. It was the third or fourth of October when the fifth brigade came through Sanski Most. They came about 9:00 in the morning and they came from the direction of Banja Luka. They asked, "Which army are you waiting for — Alija's or Tuđman's?"³⁵ They opened every house by breaking down every door. They arrived on foot. The Bosnian Army was shelling [the area], so people were in the basements. The soldiers came in the houses and robbed them. There were some Serbs from Serbia and some from Prijedor — no local Serbs [were among the soldiers]. They found people in their basements and asked, "Where are the men?" They kept the people in the basement from 9:00 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. They didn't take any men. The men were hiding in the forest, and they found them and put them in the basement. The Četniks found my husband in the woods and took him. I don't know where he is now.

The day the Serbs came I was in another house. Two guys came in camouflage, and one of them, a twenty-five year-old, wanted to rape me. I was on the couch, and he grabbed me by my arms, and I fought him, and my little girl and I were both crying and screaming, and the other guy said, "Okay, leave her alone." I didn't see them grab anyone else.

At night, they would knock on the door. They had a list of people and took people out according to the list. There didn't seem to be any categories of people. Four buses full of people left Poljak, [but the buses returned] empty. Then two more buses came. They had picked up [most of] the people, and only twelve houses had people living in them. [While the non-Serbian residents were being bused from the village], Serbs moved into the houses from Palanka [a nearby Serbian village]. They stayed for about one month.

We begged our priest and bishop to take us from our village. When the church in Poljak was destroyed on August 16, the priest left two days later. When the church was destroyed in Sasina, I asked the bishop and priest to let us move, and they told us to stay. Now they should come and see how many mass graves there are.

Other residents of Poljak interviewed by Human Rights Watch/Helsinki claimed that some of the non-Serbian women and children were rounded up by Arkan's men prior to the village's fall to Bosnian Army troops. Their whereabouts and treatment remain unknown, although many believe that they are being held in a school in Lamovita, near Prijedor. Human Rights Watch/Helsinki was not able to confirm these allegations.

Podbrežje

³⁵ Franjo Tuđman is the president of Croatia.

Ms. Drobić, a woman from village of Podbrežje, near Sanski Most,³⁶ recounted how her sons and husband were taken for forced labor and have subsequently disappeared. According to Ms. Drobić:

My husband and two sons³⁷ were taken in the night at about 1:30 a.m. on or about September 24, 1995. My sons are seventeen and eighteen years old. . . . When I asked for them in the police station, I was told they were taken for forced labor.

Three men — one of them an Arkan soldier — came to my house. Two local people, named Dušan and Pero, who were my Serbian neighbors, came with the Arkan soldier. The two were wearing military police uniforms with white belts and the Arkan soldier was dressed all in black, with short hair — very short hair. It was dark when they came. They were looking for me. They took all the men at the same time that night. They took around fifty men, but we aren't sure [of the exact number]. There were about 300 houses in the village.

After her sons and husband were taken to forced labor duty, Ms. Drobić was expelled from Šehovci. According to Ms. Drobić:

The next day regular soldiers came, and they kicked us out to Šehovci. They came and told us, "You have four minutes to get your bags." We weren't expecting this to happen; it was a complete surprise. We stayed [in Šehovci] for fifteen days.

Adis, her fourteen-year-old son and the only member of her family that had not been taken for forced labor duty, stated:

[In Šehovci] I was sleeping, and one soldier pointed a gun at me. He told me to step out of the house and asked how old I was. He grabbed me by my shirt like this [demonstrates being pulled by front of shirt] and took me out of the house. He told me he was going to kill me and take my soul. And he hit me with the gun on my head. Then he told me to go back in the house and not to move.

Šehovci

Muslims and Croats who had been expelled from their homes in the Sanski Most municipality in September and October 1995 were taken to the village of Šehovci, where they were held before being deported to Bosnian government-controlled territory. Approximately 2,500 to 3,000 non-Serbs — mostly women, children and elderly persons — were detained in the village. Those confined to the village sought shelter in the few houses and barns of Šehovci, which was too small to accommodate the influx of people. Soldiers and paramilitaries regularly harassed, robbed and terrorized those confined to the village, and threatened children with harm if their parent(s) refused to hand over the family's belongings.

³⁶ Interviewed by Human Rights Watch/Helsinki representatives in Zenica, Bosnia-Herzegovina, November 21, 1995.

³⁷ The witness's husband is Muharem Drobić, born in 1941; and her two sons are Ermin Drobić, born 1976, and Ibrahim Drobić, born 1978.

However, before Šehovci was transformed into a temporary “ghetto” for non-Serbs, the village’s original inhabitants were expelled from their homes, detained elsewhere and eventually brought back to the village before being expelled from the area completely. A.B., a painter from Šehovci,³⁸ recounted the removal of the village’s original non-Serb residents. According to A.B.:

It was around the 18th of September — I can’t remember exactly when. It was Sunday [i.e., September 17]. I was in Šehovci in my house. The whole family was sitting there. It was half past eleven in the morning. The humanitarian guy³⁹ arrived and told us to bring our tools with us and to come outside. We left our houses with nothing. They told us to go to the collection point by the marketplace [in Sanski Most] by foot. There were sixteen men who came from Šehovci to the marketplace, and my wife’s father, my son and I were among them. I told my son and father-in-law to run back home because I knew what would happen. I told them this as we started to leave the village, but my father-in-law thought we would probably just go to work duty and then come home.

When they reached Sanski Most, most of the residents were taken to other villages and some were taken to dig trenches along the frontlines or were placed in detention. A.B. hurt his hand while on work duty and was eventually treated at a clinic and was then taken to his mother-in-law’s house where his family had sought refuge after having been expelled from their home. All those who had been confined in Šehovci and were interviewed by Human Rights Watch/Helsinki representatives reported harassment, robbery and terrorization by Serbian paramilitaries. According to A.B.:

One night the police came to the door and screamed and threatened us with death. They came to our house and took all the people out and put them in two lines, one by one, and they made them beat each other. There were three police officers. Five men were taken out, without women. There was one man whose mother had died that day, and they let him go back in the house. They said that ten soldiers had been killed that day. They made categories of the people like biggest to biggest, biggest to smallest and made them fight. If they didn’t hit hard enough, they beat them with their weapons. Then they said, “Goodnight. Thank you. We’ll be back.” I don’t know who they were — whether they were local Serbs or not. Some of the soldiers were okay, but some were bad.

³⁸ Interviewed by Human Rights Watch/Helsinki representatives in Sanski Most, Bosnia-Herzegovina, November 1995.

³⁹ The Bosnian Serb authorities assigned their own people in various locations to oversee the distribution of humanitarian aid to residents, both Serb and non-Serb.

F.N., a Muslim woman from the village of Čaplje,⁴⁰ also described the general conditions in Šehovci:

There were about one hundred people in one house [in Šehovici] — it was empty, and there were no walls [the house was unfinished, and there were no interior walls]. There were more people outside than in the house. At night, Četniks would tell people they had five minutes to give them fifty or one hundred German marks; they threatened to kill you if you didn't give them [the money]. There were some young girls in the village; my daughters are twelve and fourteen. They raped the women. There were a lot of people in the house, [but] we protected the girls — they never went out of the house. The soldiers came into the house for money and gold. It was cold; there was no wood [and] no heat at all. We were allowed to bring nothing. [A woman] sat on a chair for three nights; there was no place to sleep. The Muslim villagers from Šehovci gave us some blankets. The Muslim owner of the house slept in the woods because he was afraid. We were given nothing to eat. The houses were not guarded during the day. Some of us dressed like Serbian women [in black; to resemble Serbian women in mourning], and we went out to find bread. The people from Šehovci were helping us. They were in the same position [as we] but were helping us; they had some food in their houses.

We were there for twenty days. There were people from other villages there. There was one pipe from which we could get water, but we were afraid to speak [to one another]. Some Serbs came to some houses which were nice, and the Muslims had to move out. We didn't hear any rumors about what would happen to us, but we thought they would kill us. There were mostly local soldiers in Šehovci, but there were a few Arkan paramilitaries. There were some Roma in uniform.

According to Edin⁴¹, a Muslim resident of Sanski Most who was taken to Šehovci after having been expelled from his home:

Arkan's soldiers had marine haircuts and new camouflage uniforms. Some had blue and some had red berets. We were so frightened passing by them, we walked with our heads down — we [could tell they were Arkan's soldiers] by their Serbian accents. They had a lot of belts on their bodies — dark blue or some other color. They had shirts with a lot of pockets. Some had flak jackets on. ... They were not from the fifth Kozarac brigade.

Both Edin and F.F.,⁴² a retired sixty-year-old woman, reported that children were threatened with harm by the Serbian troops. According to Edin:

Around 3,000 people were in Šehovci. At first, all the houses were crowded by Muslim refugees, and later on all of us were placed in five or six houses, and after that we were taken out. We were in Šehovci for seventeen days. When it got dark, it was as if death was getting closer. They [the Serbian

⁴⁰ Interviewed by Human Rights Watch/Helsinki representatives in Čaplje, Bosnia-Herzegovina, November 16, 1995.

⁴¹ Interviewed by Human Rights Watch/Helsinki representatives in Sanski Most, Bosnia-Herzegovina, November 1995.

⁴² Interviewed by Human Rights Watch/Helsinki representatives in Bosnia-Herzegovina, November 1995.

soldiers] came and grabbed children and threatened to cut their throats; they were always coming when it got very dark. I saw them grab children two or three years old. Women were screaming.

F.F. also reported that Serbian troops threatened young children with death in order to force the children's parents or grandparents to relinquish any money they had. According to F.F.:

I can't remember the date we arrived there [in Šehovci], but thirty or more people would live in one house at a time. We would be expelled from one house after another. We were maltreated every night: Serbian soldiers would enter the houses at night yelling, "Open the door," and demand money. The soldiers took people's grandchildren — babies — and held them in exchange for money. They would count the money, then take the baby again, and ask for more money. They would threaten to kill the children if they didn't get money. This went on for more than fifteen or sixteen days.

I.B.,⁴³ a fifty-one-year-old Muslim woman from Sanski Most, and T.E., a sixty-five-year-old man from Kijevo,⁴⁴ also reported the robbery and removal or disappearance of persons confined in the village. According to I.B.:

For three days, we were in houses in Šehovci. They took us out into a field. There were some buildings for gathering corn, and we took shelter there. Every night we were mistreated; we were robbed. They took some girls and were returning them after two hours — maybe five or six girls from the villages were taken. This was when we were in the shelter. We were so frightened at night.

According to T.E.:

We slept outside because we couldn't move inside — there was no room in any of the houses. We stayed outdoors — in front of the houses — for fifteen days. Every night they came and harmed people. At the house I slept in front of, I saw them take a young man who was about sixteen years old. He was from a Muslim village; I don't know his name. They brought him back later, but most of those they took never came back. We didn't ask any questions because we were afraid. I saw them take two or three girls outside and then bring them back — they were between fifteen and twenty years old. Some were a little bit older. They returned with bruises as if they were beaten; they had marks on their faces. I didn't look too closely because you never know when [the Serbs] will see you.

After her husband was abducted and her son was taken to forced labor, P.P.⁴⁵ and the rest of her family set out for the village of Šehovci of their own accord. P.P. described their travel to Šehovci, her sons' abduction and detention, and conditions in the village:

⁴³ Interviewed by Human Rights Watch/Helsinki representatives in Sanski Most, Bosnia-Herzegovina, November 13, 1995.

⁴⁴ Interviewed by Human Rights Watch/Helsinki representatives in Zenica, Bosnia-Herzegovina, November 20, 1995.

⁴⁵ Human Rights Watch/Helsinki interview, Zenica, November 1995.

My son was taken to forced labor the same day they picked up my husband. I also have an older son, and he was expelled from his house. So we gathered together — four grandchildren, two daughters-in-law, one son and myself. We were on our way to Šehovci when we ran into Arkan's soldiers. My son wanted to hide, but Arkan's soldiers saw him and put him in their bus. They didn't let us take any belongings. They checked our bags and beat us.

My older son, we found out, was taken to [the] Keramika [detention facility]. My daughter-in-law visited him, taking him water and food and cigarettes, but it seems he never got any of it. He was badly beaten there. My daughter brought me his jacket; it was all covered with blood. She didn't actually show me the jacket until we got here [Zenica]. We looked for my husband, but we never got anywhere. The day before we were to be transported to Bosnian government territory, my granddaughter went to visit my son [in the Keramika detention facility] to tell him we were going, but they wouldn't let her talk to him. I don't know what happened to my younger son.

A.L. described the disappearance of her uncle and cousin prior to the arrival of the buses that were to deport those in Šehovci to Bosnian government-held territory. According to A.L.:

Two days before the buses came for us, the military police came to the village in a minibus and took my uncle, Šefik Aganović, [who was] born in 1928. There were four of them, and they were dressed in camouflage. This happened on September 17, and we haven't heard from him since. The minibus had a Prijedor registration. They looked for my uncle's son but

didn't find
him, and
they came
again the
next day and
found him,
and no one
knows what
happened to
them. His
name is
Muhamed
Aganović
[and he was
born in]
1950. His
other son,
Braco, was
killed in
Sanski Most
on March 7,
1993, from
shrapnel
wounds. He
[her uncle]
was a rich
man — the
richest man
in the
village. We
think they
are dead.
They
[Serbs]
hated him
because he
was
wealthy.
They came
again after
they took
him to pick
up
everything
from his
house.
Slavko
Šušnić from
the Sanski
Most
Serbian Red

Cross was among those who came to pick up the things.⁴⁶

Persons from Šehovci appear to have been deported from the area between mid-September and early October. P.P. gave an account of the deportations from Šehovci. According to P.P.:

I am not sure, but I think it was the 28th or 29th of September when trucks and ten big buses arrived. It was so crowded that people were falling down. At one point, the convoy stopped and the Serbs took off all military-aged men. We traveled all night long. I did not know where we were going. We stopped in a field, and they told us to wait until morning. It was 3:30 in the morning, and we waited maybe for two hours. One old lady died there. . . . When we got to the drop-off point, the Serbs told us to go as quickly as possible, that Alija's country was waiting for us. So we ran as fast as we could. We had to cross through two or three more kilometers of Serb territory. The Serb soldiers made people take off their clothes since they were looking for money and jewelry. Some had masks over their faces. Many groups of soldiers would appear and demand money from us. . . . People were bloodied. I saw some women lying dead. Some had died, some had been killed. When someone died, they wouldn't let the corpses remain on "their" land; we had to carry them to the Bosnian side. Some were covered by blankets, and our men [older men and invalids] carried them.

Stara Rijeka

⁴⁶ The witness knew this man because each town and village had one assigned Serbian humanitarian worker who was responsible for overseeing the distribution of supplies.

E.E.,⁴⁷ a forty-one-year-old woman, lived in the village of Stara Rijeka, approximately eight kilometers from Sanski Most. E.E. claimed that Arkan's soldiers appeared in her area sometime in September, prompting all military-aged Muslim and Croatian men to go into hiding. The villagers were ordered to leave the lights on in their houses when it got dark, so as to enable Arkan's men to identify occupied houses. According to E.E., the soldiers proceeded from house to house indiscriminately beating and rounding up civilians:

I heard that there were 700 [soldiers belonging to Arkan] in Stara Rijeka and Stari Majdan. Muslims and Croats were given the same treatment. The people who lived in villages near the road were taken to camps, but many people went into hiding in the woods and in the hills. I'm not sure, but I believe fifty to one hundred men from Stara Rijeka and Stari Majdan were taken. We heard that they went first to Omarska, and they have not come back since. That was about forty days ago, just a few days before the Bosnian Army came. Some of the younger Croats were taken to the Serbian army and were forced to fight for them. There were also Serbs who lived in Stara Rijeka and Stari Majdan who wanted to help their [non-Serb] neighbors. Arkan's people also beat those people — the Serbs who tried to help.

E.E. had given birth to a baby the day before she was interviewed by Human Rights Watch/Helsinki representatives. The baby's father is a Serbian soldier. When asked how she was treated by the Bosnian Serbs during the war, E.E. continued:

You can judge. This child is a Serb's child. They forced girls to live with them, or a lot of them would rape you. So I decided to live with one soldier, and that's his child. He is in the Serbian army, and we lived together. I didn't want this child, but I have him now; he is my child. A Serbian doctor told me before the war that I could not be a mother because Croats and Muslims cannot be mothers.

Mistreatment in Detention

Muslim and Croatian men who were arbitrarily arrested, detained and forced to work for Serbian military or civilian authorities in the Sanski Most and Prijedor area in late September and early October, were taken to a ceramics factory near Sanski Most, alternately referred to as Sanakeram or Keramika, and/or to a location near Prijedor. Many were beaten or otherwise mistreated in detention, and some were reportedly executed or beaten to death while in detention.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Interviewed by Human Rights Watch/Helsinki representatives in Bosnia-Herzegovina, November, 1995.

⁴⁸ At least eleven men may have been summarily executed at the Sanakeram/Keramika factory. When the area was captured by the Bosnian Army, corpses were found lined up in a row, where they had been dragged after having been shot apparently against a wall. Media photographs and Bosnian police photographs showed a trail of blood from the execution spot to the place where the bodies were placed. Of the eleven victims, one was about eighty years old, and another appeared to have been seventeen or eighteen years old. One man was confirmed dead in the Sanakeram/Keramika factory, but we do not have information on the others.

Senakeram/Keramika was a ceramics factory in the village of Kamengrad, about two kilometers from Sanski Most. A.B., a painter from Šehovici,⁴⁹ was detained in the factory and recounted his experience to Human Rights Watch/Helsinki representatives:

They organized the convoy [in Šehovci]; I'm not sure of the date — I think on the 7th of October — and my family and I were put on the convoy and they told us we were leaving for [the Bosnian government-held town of] Tešanj. I paid the driver one hundred German marks just to accept us. They promised us they would give us no problems, and that's why I gave them the money. They took us to the gas station, and we stopped. They selected men aged sixteen to sixty and took us off the bus, including my son. My wife and her mother showed some papers [that proved] my son had problems with his eyes; some soldiers wanted to allow him back on the bus, but the others didn't.

The Serb soldiers removed a certain number of draft-age men from the bus. Apparently, they needed a specific number of men, and A.B. volunteered to replace his sick son, who had been told to disembark from the bus. According to A.B.:

We were taken to Oštra Luka, about fifteen kilometers from Sanski Most. They said they wanted everyone who was of draft age to come off the bus, so I volunteered to replace my son. My son stayed on the bus; I had to replace him to fill the number. Then the bus from Prijedor came, and they put us on the bus and took us to Keramika-Sanakeram.

After the men arrived at the Senakeram/Keramika factory, some of the men were beaten. According to A.B.:

Thirty-seven of us arrived at [the] Keramika [factory]. We had to relinquish whatever was in our pockets. I had a nail clipper, but I didn't give it to them. Half an hour after I got there, a Serbian commander asked the thirty-seven of us [who had just arrived] to get out and told us to put our hands on the wall. He asked who had nail clippers, and I said that I did. He made me lie on the floor, and he started to kick my kidneys, and he started to jump on me. They made us say that Alija is a shit. They asked one guy, and he said, "Alija is a Muslim" and he was beaten so badly. There were three policemen — two Serbs and a Muslim — who were beating people with three different kinds of batons: two were round, steel batons, and one was wooden.

A.B. described the conditions and their treatment in the detention center:

⁴⁹ Interviewed by Human Rights Watch/Helsinki representatives in Sanski Most, Bosnia-Herzegovina, November, 1995.

We did not get any food for five days — nothing — and the people already there hadn't gotten any food for seven days at times. There was a big jerry can with water, but if they saw you stand up [the guards were outside, watching through the window] they would shoot you, so you had to walk on your knees to go to the bathroom or for water.⁵⁰ On the fifth day, we got lunch packages, but one group didn't get any, so the soldier told me to go and ask people for part of their packages; they were "meals ready to eat" so people got only a quarter of the package. ... I didn't get a package, so a friend of mine gave me some salt. I wasn't the only one who didn't get something to eat. I didn't want to ask anyone [for part of their food].

On the fifth night [of our detention], the Muslim [police officer who had abused us earlier] — his name was Ahmet Šefić and he was from Kamengrad — asked us for our money, jewelry, watches and said we had to give that urgently. Then the Serbian police officer entered and cocked his weapon and said, "If I find even one German mark hidden [on anyone's person], I will kill that person." That Serb was from Vlačić Mountain. I gave him 200 Swiss francs but kept 400 German marks with me. It was Monday [probably October 2], and it was such a confused atmosphere. Nobody was beaten up that day; no one was asking questions — it was the quietest night. Then I was frightened because I thought, "What if they check and find my German marks." Three days later, one man entered the room and told us to face the wall. He checked all the blankets and checked people one by one, and I ate all the money. I still feel a pain from it occasionally. A guy who was standing there with me told me to eat the money or I might get caught.

Prisoners were beaten and killed during A.B.'s period of detention in the Senakeram/Keramika factory. According to A.B.:

In the same period, they started asking for one group of people by name. Then they asked for those from Sanski Most by name. One guy who had been beaten five times told me to volunteer to replace those who were beaten five times because I had only been beaten once. I volunteered, and I stood at the place where people were being beaten. One line was for people being beaten. I stood on the second line; ten people were in each line. A Četnik was giving cigarettes to people who smoke, and he told me, "You see how good I am. I am giving you cigarettes, but I have to kill you." The Četnik was in the middle of the hallway. While people were smoking, he told those in the other line to go to be beaten.

All the time we were standing in the lines, there were two bodies in the corridor with their heads broken in [beaten to death]. So when they took the first row out, the screaming started. I was on the right, the others were on the left [side of the hallway, where the beatings were conducted]. The first one in my line asked the soldier to let him go because he had a lame arm and leg. The soldier told him, "You won't need them soon." The second man said he didn't have four of his fingers, and he said, "Please don't beat me because I am handicapped," and the soldier said, "You won't need them." Since I was the last one in line, I realized that we were going to be killed. Then I realized I had to escape.

⁵⁰ A.B. described how a guard had shot into the room and killed a man when he saw someone walking.

I ran from the row [back into the room] and laid on a dead man. The man had died before, and they knew where he was, and I knew they probably wouldn't notice me. Then we heard a gunshot through the window and one man was killed, but we didn't know until the next morning that he was dead.

The soldier from the corridor didn't see me, but the guard from outside saw someone run. Another man came and laid on me and I was relieved because they couldn't see me. Then Ahmet came to the room and said, "We need a tenth person." I couldn't see, but I heard that the one [person] next to the door was taken to that row, and his son was already in the row, so both of them were killed. I heard ten shots and then three more — that means that some of them were not killed the first time.

After that, Ahmet came into the room and took a gun. He asked for money again and held the gun like a cowboy, crooked up in his arm. A Serb was following him with empty hands. I had a watch and three and a half German marks, and he was coming in my direction and I was telling him I had this, but he went past me. Then Ahmet said, "I need 2000 German marks and the money is to be found." They took everything anybody had left. Then one man wanted to take out the dead body out of the room, and then the Četnik said, "He's all right." I gave up my watch and money. When a guy took the body out and returned shaking — he needed water — he said he saw a lot of corpses. All the bodies were collected in one place.

R.R.,⁵¹ a store inspector from Sanski Most described how all non-Serbian male civilians were pulled off a convoy and taken to Keramika, where their names were checked against a list and where they were indiscriminately beaten. The men were taken from the convoy as the Bosnian Army was shelling in the Sanski Most area and were poised to take control of the town. According to R.R.:

I was in Šehovci for fifteen days. After the Serbs organized a convoy that left Šehovci, they separated the men from the families. There were five buses and two trucks. Thirty-six men were taken from that convoy [at Oštra Luka]. I was taken from the convoy at a gas station in Sanski Most.

We were transported to Keramika, and the guards took everything from us, including our identification cards. They threatened us saying they would kill anyone who was hiding something. We were all put in one room. I counted the tiles in the room and figured out we had approximately 250 square meters there. I also counted the men: there were 600 men with their heads down. The soldiers guarding us wore gray uniforms, like police in prisons. They were not Serbs [from Serbia proper]. They were Bosnian Serbs, but in Šehovci the people entering our houses had accents. . . [from Serbia proper].

That night people were asked their names, which were checked against a list.

Around ten or fifteen people were taken from the list for beating. They beat them so badly, that the men couldn't sit. It was horrible. People couldn't walk to their places. The soldiers had big batons made of some metal like steel. It was a kind of police baton, but bigger, heavier. They said that they were looking for information about who had weapons. During the night — until three o'clock in the morning — they were reading names and beating people. They took a break until eight in the morning.

⁵¹ Interviewed by Human Rights Watch/Helsinki representatives in Bosnia- Hercegovina, November, 1995.

At 8:00 a.m. on the following day, the guards started to call all the people who had arrived the night before, and ten of the men were put in a line with their hands against the wall. R.R. was one of the ten:

They asked us where our weapons were. We were beaten. Each man was asked the same question. Then they asked us who had the weapons. Again, we were beaten. The ones who were younger were beaten more than the older men. They were beating our arms, our kidneys and our heads and part of our necks. But the beating of people who were called out by name was the worst. The ones whose names were read from a list were eventually killed. At around 10:00 a.m., they ordered that six men go to the woods to work. I didn't volunteer, but later on, they called me and another man and took us near the soccer field in Sanski Most. Nobody was guarding us. They just left us there to wait for someone to pick us up.

A bus to Šehovci was driving by. I knew the driver. He was a Serb; I knew him from my job. If Arkan's people had found us, they would probably have killed us. We lay on the floor [of the bus], because when I worked as a forced laborer, I was told everyone who made it out of a detention camp to area prohibited to Muslims would be killed. We mixed in with the people. We didn't leave the bus when we got to Šehovci; the bus was on its way to Teslić. In Teslić, they took us off. The military police had SDS⁵² insignia. I asked them, "Leave us to our kids." After some hesitation, the policeman told us to go back to the bus. We exited the bus and headed towards no-man's land. We ran into some policemen in the forest; they were from Sanski Most and Teslić, and I recognized one Gypsy working with the Serbian army. A lot of Gypsies have been mobilized into the Serbian army.

Although R.R. managed to escape, A.B. and those detained with him were taken from the Keramika factory to another detention center in the Prijedor area. A.B. reported that the prisoners in the Prijedor facility were removed from their place of detention and later returned. According to A.B.:

They started to hide us. They were taking us to Kozara Mountain by buses, and you had to put your face down so you couldn't see anything; if you looked up they would hit us. We were there for three hours. When we got back, the hall was cleaned as if no one had been there, and the cars were parked on the place we were sleeping so they could hide everything.

The next day I was taken to the village of Ljubija, and I had to work. They took us in different groups. We were digging trenches. Then they took us back to the automobile factory, and once again the hall was cleaned and the cars were parked and they took the cars out. One night we relaxed because no one mistreated us, but we were exhausted and we were lying on our jackets. Then two police officers arrived — one said his name was Goran Jovanović, and he came in the hall and said, "The two of us came from Sanski Most especially to say goodbye to you, and one by one you are going to leave the room and we won't see each other again soon." The other person's name was Dragan Dušanović. He read a list, and they took four people out, and they beat them so badly I still wonder how they stayed alive.

⁵² Srpska Demokratska Stranka or Serbian Democratic Party; the ruling party in Bosnian-Serb held areas headed by Radovan Karadžić.

Everyone thought they would die. One of them was named Seleš [surname], from Šehovci. He was beaten badly.

There were some Croats there also. When the two beaten people complained, a police car arrived and prevented the guards from beating the people. Those two Serbs who were beating people were taken by the police. We got food that night.

Fifty people, including A.B., were then taken to Oštra Luka and exchanged during a prisoner exchange.

A.U.,⁵³ a sixty-four-year-old retired construction worker from Poljak before the war, described how the Serb forces held him in detention and randomly beat and allegedly executed male civilians shortly before the Bosnian Army captured the area:

It was the 22nd of September, about one o'clock in the afternoon. Two soldiers with red berets and uniforms of the military police with Serbian accents asked me for my documents. I had identification from the ex-Yugoslavia and some sort of paper which stated that I was loyal to the Serbs. They cursed my mother and tore it up in front of the house. They put me in an old Opel with another prisoner and took us to a place near the hotel in Sanski Most. They beat me so hard I couldn't recognize myself. I can't believe I can still see with my eyes. There were about twenty people there, and they put us in some little building where there was a heater for the hotel and other buildings. It was so small, we were crammed in like matches. They beat every man, young and old, in that room. In the morning, they opened the door and asked if anyone had died. We said, yes, because three had died.

A.U. and his fellow detainees were taken to Keramika three days later and then to the Prijedor area. According to A.U.:

⁵³ Interviewed by Human Rights Watch/Helsinki representatives in Bosnia-Herzegovina, November, 1995.

After three days, they put us in a bus, and they brought us to Keramika. For three days, we didn't receive any food or water. Then other men arrived from Kamengrad, and they brought food. Ninety percent of the men from there were Muslims. Twelve people were taken someplace outside. We heard bullets, but we didn't see what happened. ... Then we were marched by foot, to Prijedor. There were about 330 to 340 of us, and they took us all; it took six hours to cover the approximately thirty kilometers. They told us we couldn't bring blankets or jackets. When we arrived at Rasavci, about eight kilometers outside of Prijedor, we waited in the village about an hour. Then three trucks came from Prijedor, and every man got into those trucks. The Serbs delivered us to an automobile garage. It was empty - just concrete. I was in that hole for three weeks. There was one guy with such problems with his stomach that he died. At one point, they drove all of us in buses to Kozara Mountain, because they didn't want the Red Cross [i.e., ICRC] to see us.⁵⁴ We spent seven days in Kozara and were driven back every night to that hole. Later, they exchanged 305 of us on the front lines on November first.⁵⁵ But five to six days before the exchange, everybody got beaten. The people who beat us were people from Serbia. They put everybody on the line, and they didn't miss anyone. It was a bad beating. Some people couldn't move, because they had broken ribs. I was exchanged, but about thirty men were detained. We met the Serbs who were being exchanged [from the Bosnian government side], and it was very interesting because my Serb neighbor was there, and we hugged each other. Some Serbs said, "Hello, my brother. Why did we need this war?"

ABUSES IN OTHER BOSNIAN SERB-HELD AREAS OF NORTHERN BOSNIA

Ključ

Before the war, the municipality of Ključ contained approximately 37, 233 people of which 47.6 percent were Muslim and 49.5 percent were Serb. On May 27, 1992, local Serb army and police chiefs took control of the area, and on May 29, the Muslims of Ključ were told via radio announcements and police loudspeakers to gather at five locations around town to be taken from the area. The men and intelligentsia were separated from the women, children and elderly and were taken away. A large segment of the non-Serb civilians were bused away and during the course of the next three years, the rest were subjected to a policy of forced labor. More than 10,000 non-Serb men from the Ključ region are unaccounted for.

In September, 1995 the town's approximately 20,000 Serbs were evacuated due to the Croatian and Bosnian counteroffensive, and the last 400 to 500 Muslims hid in the woods and basements for fear of last minute reprisals.

⁵⁴ Human Rights Watch/Helsinki representatives learned from officials at the U.S. embassy in Zagreb that the ICRC had visited the area.

⁵⁵ The exchange actually took place on October 30, 1995. The Serbian side released twenty-one ABiH soldiers and 303 male Muslim civilians. See Jane Perlez, "Bosnian Serbs Free 300 Muslim Civilians In Prisoner Exchange," New York Times, November 1, 1995.

O.G., a fifty-two-year-old Muslim woman,⁵⁶ and her family remained in the town of Ključ while it was under Bosnian Serb control. Her fifty-two-year-old husband and twenty-two-year-old son were frequently forced to work for, and were abused by, the Bosnian Serb military and civilian authorities. On August 15, 1995, O.G.'s husband was taken from his home by Bosnian Serb soldiers. He remains disappeared. According to O.G.:

On the 15th of August 1995 about 7:30 p.m., two Serb soldiers came [to my home] in a Mercedes without plates — it was a blue-gray color. They were dressed in black uniforms with red berets. I did not know them, and my Serb neighbors also didn't know them. They told my husband that he was supposed to come with them for work to carry two tons of flour for them. I do not know where they took him. He had no documents, and had only a shirt with short sleeves, pants with no belt, and shoes without socks — nothing else. Twelve hours after he disappeared, I went to the police to report him as missing. I also reported his disappearance to [a] UNHCR [protection officer]. The police told me that they would do everything to find him, but didn't do anything. I packed my things and went to Banja Luka to ask the police there if they knew where my husband was. The UNHCR worker wanted to come to Ključ to ask the authorities here what happened to him, but [the Bosnian Serb authorities] didn't allow her. She wanted to help, but nothing could be done. One month after he was taken, Ključ fell to the Fifth Corps [of the Bosnian Army]. I have had no information since he was taken — nothing; nothing at all. Nobody knows anything. There were rumors about what happened to him, but I didn't accept that they were true, because there was no real information. Tomorrow will be three months to the day that they took my husband. I could accept whatever happened to him. This is a war. Is he dead? Is he alive? I just want to know.

⁵⁶ Interviewed by Human Rights Watch/Helsinki representatives in Ključ, Bosnia-Herzegovina, November 14, 1995.

One month after her husband was disappeared, O.G.'s son was once again taken to work duty, mistreated and returned. Soon thereafter, the Bosnian Army launched an offensive on the town, and O.G. described the mistreatment of non-Serbs by Serb soldiers in Ključ at that time:⁵⁷

They took my son one month after my husband vanished. They took him to Pudin Han, a village on the way to Sanski Most that the Serbs burned down. He was there for one month. When he got back he would not talk about it too much, except to say he was beaten every day. He was traumatized.

We were all maltreated in our neighborhood. The special police were going through the neighborhood yelling about how they would kill all of us by cutting our throats. We looked out the window and saw the special police in black uniforms and red berets. I don't know who they were.

The Serbian civilians were told to evacuate Ključ on September 14 by 6:00 p.m. On September 15, the day Ključ fell [to the Bosnian Army], two men came to our house and put a gun to our heads and threatened to kill us. One man was named Lekić and one Sirar; I don't know their other names. They wore black uniforms; not camouflage, but plain black [uniforms] with red berets and with the four "c's" sign on their caps⁵⁸ and on their uniforms. Their accents [indicated that they were] from Ključ. My son was supposed to go to forced labor that day. He had received a notice [to report to work duty], but I kept him home that day because I thought he might not come back. When they came to my house, I gave them some money so they would not take my son. My son was beaten. We went to the forest with our neighbors to hide until the Fifth Corps of the Bosnian Army could liberate the town.

All the town's residents were in the forest hiding. Men in black uniforms had never been in the city before. I saw them for the first time on September 14. I think they were some sort of special police; maybe they had been on the front line until September. I did not see anyone from Serbia here at any time during the war. What is burned now was burned by the Serbs as they left. Those in the black uniforms burned houses in Ključ; we watched them from the forest. When we returned home from the forest, we did not find a lot of houses broken into. On September 15, they were entering houses and taking things. These soldiers burned both Serb and Muslim apartments, but only some.

On the night of September 15-16, the Fifth Corps [of the Bosnian Army] entered the city. We heard that we were supposed to be killed on the morning of the 16th and the bridge was supposed to be blown up. The Serbs gave some resistance. Approximately 18,000 non-Serbs from Ključ left or were killed during the war; there were about 1,700 to 1,800 people here during the last months [prior to Bosnian Army's capture of the town], and about 470 people were left in the town when it was liberated.

⁵⁷ Interviewed by Human Rights Watch/Helsinki representatives in Ključ, Bosnia-Herzegovina, November 14, 1995.

⁵⁸ The four-"c" (i.e., the letter "s" in the Cyrillic alphabet) symbol refers to a national Serbian slogan, "*Samo sloga Srbina spasava*" (Only unity saves the Serbs).

According to O.G., many men were taken away by the Bosnian Serb authorities shortly before the town's capture by the Bosnian Army, and most remain disappeared.

Banja Luka

Banja Luka, the second-largest city after Sarajevo, continued to be the scene of the most severe and systematic "ethnic cleansing" during the almost four-year-old war in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Non-Serbs have been "cleansed" through systematic persecution that included torture, murder, rape, beatings, harassment, *de jure* discrimination, intimidation, expulsion from homes, confiscation of property, bombing of businesses, dismissal from work, and the destruction of cultural objects such as mosques and Catholic churches.

Although the city of Banja Luka has long had a Serbian majority, many of the surrounding towns and villages were predominantly Muslim. Before the outbreak of war in April 1992, the Banja Luka municipality had a population of 195,139 of which 54.8 percent (or 106,878) were Serbs; 14.9 percent (or 29,033) were Croats; 14.6 percent (or 28,550) were Muslims and 15.7 percent (or 30,678) labeled themselves as "others." Now only a few thousand non-Serbs remain in the Banja Luka municipality.

F.E., a Muslim man from Banja Luka,⁵⁹ and his wife were trying to escape from soldiers he referred to as "Arkan's troops," who were searching for him. They ran into a house of a friend and then jumped out of a window to evade capture. According to F.E.:

I ran to the house of the man whose son brought me from Kotor Varoš. I didn't know what was happening; he told me to come upstairs and he told me the Arkan guys were searching house to house. My wife had jumped out after me and didn't want to follow me but didn't know the way to the house. Then my mother tried to jump out of the window, and one of the men hit her on the head with his gun⁶⁰ and knocked her down. The men caught my wife and began to beat her. They demanded money from her.⁶¹ In the meantime, my mother had come out of the apartment and a Serbian lady began to say things like, "Look at the Baliže! Turk, I will go and tell the police so they can kill her." Another Serbian woman told her to leave her alone. "She is an old woman," she said.

F.E.'s mother described what happened after her son had fled:

Then I saw Arkan's men and two young boys looking at something. They asked the young boy who I was, and the young boy said, "How should I know who she is?" They asked me who I was, and I gave them a Serbian name. I went back to hide behind the house of my relative. I was just sitting there for five hours. My kidneys are still hurting me. I saw many of Arkan's men — a lot of them. When everything calmed down, I knocked on a lady's door and she allowed me to come in, but her husband wasn't happy about it.

⁵⁹ Interviewed by Human Rights Watch/Helsinki representatives in Zagreb, Croatia, November 10, 1995.

⁶⁰ The witness's mother showed a Human Rights Watch/Helsinki representative a small, linear scar on her forehead that she claimed was left by the blow.

⁶¹ The witness's wife showed a Human Rights Watch/Helsinki representatives cuts and bruises on both legs which were healing. She had also been hit on her back.

He told me to sit in the dark and wait; he gave me some blankets. She woke me up at 4:00 a.m. and told me to get out; I had to leave because Arkan's people showed up; they kill Muslims and also people who hide Muslims. She gave me a black scarf so I could pretend to be a Serb [in mourning], so I put on the scarf and went back to the house. I couldn't recognize my daughter-in-law because she was so beaten up. Everyone told me to run, so I went back to one friend. I saw a woman and asked her the location of my friend's house, and she asked me, "Is that you?" She took me to someone's house, but he wouldn't accept me, and then a Croatian lady whose husband is Serbian let me in.

M.Q., a thirty-two-year-old Muslim man,⁶² and his pregnant wife from Banja Luka, were expelled from their home and taken to the Sava River, where they were to be expelled into Croatia. M.Q. described that he and some of the other men awaiting deportation were separated from the group and threatened with death. According to M.Q.:

We were in Srbac [in Bosnia], at the Sava river across from Davor [in Croatia]. My wife and others were in the boat. She was already in labor. Five of us were separated from our families, and a captain gave orders to kill us. There were between fifty and one hundred people there, and he was looking for victims. He picked five men at random and said we couldn't go across. They [Bosnian Serb soldiers] pointed machine guns at the others and told them to cross the river. Just by chance, they let my wife go. The people from UNHCR had followed the convoy to the river. There was one young lady from England or the States, and the captain ordered them not to ask us anything, and they withdrew because the army told them they couldn't come any closer. They couldn't see us after that. The captain said to one of the soldiers, "Zoran, take these bullshitters to the woods when the U.N. leaves and kill them." We were in a field near the woods. One soldier came near us when he had the opportunity and told us to be quiet if the captain provoked us. Two soldiers walked us in a column, one soldier in front and one in back. My life flashed in front of me.

The mayor of Davor, the UNMOs [U.N. military observers] and others were on the Croatian side of the river. When my wife and my mother and daughter crossed the river, the mayor asked them why they were crying, and she told them what happened. The mayor of Davor crossed the river and talked to the captain, who was drunk and was screaming and yelling. There were too many witnesses for them to kill us. They finally let us go. The captain wanted revenge for two men lost in Bihać, but I think it was only an excuse.

Prijedor

Before the war, the Prijedor municipality had 112,470 inhabitants, 44 percent of whom were Muslim, 42.5 percent Serbs, 5.6 percent Croats and 7.9 percent members of other nationalities. Today, there are some ten to fifteen Muslims families left in Prijedor. About 2,000 people were expelled in October 1995. According to witnesses interviewed by Human Rights Watch/Helsinki, Serb forces expelled persons from their home in the Prijedor

⁶² Interviewed by Human Rights Watch/Helsinki representatives in Zagreb, Croatia, November 10, 1995.

municipality, rounded them up at various collection areas such as the football [soccer] stadium, put them on buses, and sent them to Bosnian government-controlled areas. However, witnesses and family members estimate that approximately 350 people, mostly men between the ages of twenty and fifty but also some girls and women, were taken from the buses put on trucks and taken to an undisclosed location. The fate of those taken from the buses remains unknown. Those who were permitted to cross into Bosnian government-controlled territory were frequently stopped by Serbian soldiers and paramilitaries and were robbed of money, jewelry and other personal items.

B.B.,⁶³ a forty-two-year-old woman, explained how her family was expelled from Prijedor and how her husband was taken from the convoy of buses carrying those being deported. According to B.B.:

It was a mass expulsion. One Serbian family entered our house — two children, a husband and wife. They just told us to leave, and we left. All the Muslims from the city were expelled. We went to the [local] Red Cross, gave them seventy German marks [for] each [family member] and got on the buses. I was on the Sunday convoy which left at 6:00 p.m. There were thirteen buses in the convoy leaving from Prijedor for [the Bosnian government-controlled town of] Teslić. Men were taken off my bus. The day before we were to leave, they started to take men off the convoys and continued until we left.

My husband was taken off the bus before Teslić in Blatnica, a Serbian village in the woods. Young soldiers from Prijedor took my husband. I have two sons, one is thirteen and a half, and the other one is eight and a half. I was beaten up and they threatened to cut one of my sons' throats. Soldiers entered the bus. They had flashlights and knew exactly who they wanted to take off the bus. They took my husband out into a field surrounded by woods and put him in a line. I got out of the bus, too, but they would not allow me to go to the line. I asked one soldier if I needed to give him money to get my husband back. He didn't want to talk to me. They put us back on the bus and left the men behind. I do not know what happened to them.

After five kilometers, the buses stopped, and we continued to walk four kilometers through the woods, crossing a river. After we were taken off the buses, we were stopped by two or three soldiers. Each soldier stopped us and asked for money and jewelry. I was frightened. They took my eldest son and threatened him unless I gave them money. Within those four kilometers, I gave money all the time. In all, I gave 1,500 German marks. At the last checkpoint, the soldiers stopped us and put a knife to my oldest son's throat. I did not have any money left. My son took thirty German marks from his pocket and gave that to the soldiers. It saved his life. I started to cry.

⁶³ Interviewed by Human Rights Watch/Helsinki representatives in Bosnia-Herzegovina, November 20, 1995.

A.A., a nurse⁶⁴ whose husband had been killed during the war, also recounted how she and her children were rounded up by the Serbs and transported to Bosnian government-controlled territory. According to A.A.:

On the sixth of October, we left Prijedor at 2:00 p.m. in five buses. We paid seventy German marks per person, including children. We were supposed to go to Davor from where we'd cross over the river with boats, but they intended to take us to Teslić. I was born in Banja Luka, so when we got to Banja Luka, I saw that we were not heading in the direction of Davor. Night caught us there. Our convoy of five was joined by ten buses from Bosanski Novi and ten from Banja Luka.

I saw that we were heading towards the forest, and I asked this policeman from Prijedor — I worked with his wife — to take me and my kids out of the bus, but he did not respond. He told me to hold on to my documents and kids. He told me to hide my jewelry from the Bosnian Army. Instead of the Bosnian Army, the Serbs took it. A policeman from Prijedor and two girls from the [local] Red Cross rode with our bus, but the two girls got off the bus when five soldiers entered the bus. One girl was sitting with my daughter. I was sitting in front of them with my son. One soldier saw my daughter and wanted to take her out. My daughter is beautiful. They [the soldiers] told us to put our heads down and stepped out of the bus. When they left the bus, they began talking about who was going to be with my daughter first. My son started to scream. One girl was standing outside with the soldiers. I don't know if she was a Serb. It was dark. A soldier sitting next to me saw that I was not feeling well and that my son was screaming; he told me that it would be OK. Finally, the bus continued the trip.

In the forest we got off the bus and were told we couldn't take our bags with us. My kids and I, we just took two bags. It was half past midnight when they told us to go towards the Blatnica river. It was a fast mountain river. I was told a woman drowned there earlier. We fell down because the current was strong; I lost some things from my bag. When we crossed the river, we saw the bodies of two old women. Then, we found ourselves in a field. We didn't know where we were supposed to go. We were at the front lines, but didn't know it. The whole area was mined. What rescued us was the full moon which enabled us to see. We walked four kilometers towards our army's territory.

⁶⁴ Interviewed by Human Rights Watch/Helsinki representatives in Bosnia-Herzegovina, November, 1995.

N.I., a seventy-four-year-old woman,⁶⁵ from Prijedor recounted a similar experience. According to N.I.:

We were collected in front of the Red Cross, which is next to the football field. I don't know how many buses there were, maybe five or six. People from the [local] Red Cross read names from the list as Muslims streamed in from everywhere. At around midnight, we left Prijedor and we didn't know where we were going.

The soldiers took off two men from my bus, but these were not men I knew. The soldiers were probably from Prijedor. One [of the men taken from the bus] got back on the bus and asked his mother to give him 300 German marks. She had only 200 German marks. People on the bus collected the other one hundred marks. I didn't have any money. They paid for both of them, and both got back on the bus. These were young men.

We stopped near a small bridge over a river. We were then made to walk, and at a number of checkpoints, the soldiers took all our bags with our wardrobes. They took my purse, and they asked if I was carrying hand grenades to Alija [Izetbegović, President of Bosnia-Herzegovina]. They took my two rings and my watch, which were in my purse, and they took [my husband's] shaving equipment. They took my boots, everything that was in my bags. Furthermore, they didn't let us cross the bridge; they made us walk through the river. They had put some wood over the river, but it was wet, so we couldn't walk normally. People were falling down. When we crossed all of that, the river and the woods, my legs were bloody. When we reached Bosnian government-controlled territory, the Bosnian Army gave us food and gave me first-aid.

A.P., a woman from Prijedor,⁶⁶ left her home and reported that two bus loads of persons expelled from the Prijedor area remain unaccounted for. According to A.P.:

Three soldiers came to our house. They told us we had to move out or they would cut our throats. These were Serbs from elsewhere, I think from Glamoc or Grahovo.⁶⁷ They were wearing regular uniforms, nothing special. My daughter, my husband, and I were there. There were some neighbors who were watching. We just took our bags and left. We were expecting this to happen, because people were being expelled every day.

They collected everyone in the stadium. There were thirteen busloads of people, but two buses disappeared with women, children and men in them — about one hundred to 110 persons in total. The thirteen buses left Prijedor all at the same time, but two buses separated from the group just before Teslić. We left Prijedor at 11:10 p.m. and arrived about 5:15 a.m. [in

⁶⁵ Interviewed by Human Rights Watch/Helsinki representatives in Bosnia-Herzegovina, November 1995.

⁶⁶ Interviewed by Human Rights Watch/Helsinki representatives in Zenica, Bosnia-Herzegovina, November 21, 1995. The woman chose not to disclose her name and the name used here is a pseudonym.

⁶⁷ Serbs were displaced from these areas following a Bosnian and Croatian offensive in mid-1995, and those evicting the witness from her home may have been among those displaced.

Teslić]. The buses left Prijedor on October 9. We were going straight toward Teslić, and the two buses went toward the mountains about ten or fifteen minutes before [we reached] Teslić. We traveled together about six or seven hours. The ICRC had a list of people on the buses, so they did not follow those particular buses — usually they tried to follow the buses of people being expelled.

At the checkpoint in Teslić, the Serbs had a list, so they removed all the young men from the buses. Five men were taken from my bus, but forty men were collected from all the buses. They asked me, “How much did you pay for your husband [to remain with you] in Prijedor?” I told them nothing because they just moved us out, and he told me, “Now you have to pay for him if you want us to give him back.” I gave them 500 German marks, and when I gave him the money I wanted to go with him to point out my husband, and he told me I had to go back to the bus. Then we went on again, and they took him in a blue and white police mini-van.

On the way from Prijedor there were thirteen checkpoints, and at every checkpoint they took something from us. We never saw people from international organizations in Prijedor.

Ljubija⁶⁸

B.I., a sixty-two-year-old carpenter whose daughter was raped by Serbian soldiers⁶⁹ described how, in October, the remaining Muslims were gathered and expelled from the area:

On the eighth of October, we left Ljubija. We were warned a few days before that we were going to have to leave. We were told that if we didn't, Arkan's men would come. I arrived in Prijedor around 5:00 in the morning and waited until 11:00 in the evening. They put us in a bus at around 9:00 p.m. as they registered our names. There were around fifty people on the bus. It was crowded. They made lists, and we sat on the bus until we left at 11:00. There were approximately thirteen buses in the line.

During the journey, the convoy was pulled over by soldiers, and military-aged Muslim men were taken off the buses, separated and taken away on trucks. The remaining civilians were then harassed and some threatened with summary execution if they did not relinquish their money and jewelry. B.I. continued:

No one [Serbian soldiers] entered my bus until Teslić. We stopped at the Hotel Lav; there, two men entered the bus — soldiers in camouflage uniforms — and asked the driver to switch on the interior lights. They asked us for money, video cassettes, cameras, and other things. I had eighty-five German marks with me. All the people on the bus gave them something. They took approximately twenty people from the buses, but they took no one

⁶⁸ A suburb of Prijedor, approximately twelve kilometers southwest of the city.

⁶⁹ Interviewed by Human Rights Watch/Helsinki representatives in Bosnia-Herzegovina, November 1995. The daughter's account is in the Stari Majdan section.

from my bus. Women were screaming, and I saw a line of men outside. The men were taken by the police in a kind of truck. I'm not sure how many men were taken away. I think they were military-aged men. Elderly people like me were not taken off the buses.

From that point, the buses had to go, two by two, for another six kilometers. We didn't get out of the bus until we reached the point where we had to cross a river. There they showed us the road where we were supposed to go. That was the worst part. I had taken two bags, and my wife had one; we were on our way, and a soldier saw me carrying the bags. He said: "Old man, I see you have two bags. That is too much for you." He started screaming for money. I told him I didn't have any. Since I told him I didn't have any money, he ordered me to walk twenty meters up a hill towards a tree. I stopped, and he screamed. My wife was standing by this soldier, so I asked her to ask him what he wanted. He took 200 German marks from my wife and then allowed me to continue. Each step of the way we met soldiers who demanded money. The soldiers were wearing camouflage uniforms, but at the last checkpoint, some of them had socks on their heads. We crossed the river on a small bridge made out of pieces of wood and found ourselves in no man's land. We walked approximately three kilometers until we met Bosnian Army soldiers.

O.U., a thirty-six-year-old tailor from the village of Ljubija, recalled how the Serbs abducted her husband as they were being transported to the front lines. On October 10, at approximately 10:00 a.m., three Serbian civilians arrived to tell her that she had to leave by 12:00. She, along with the rest of the non-Serb civilians, was allowed to take only a few things. Two buses waited. At the entrance to the bus, they were forced to hand over their house keys. Their names were registered and the bus transported them to Prijedor, where we were left at the football field. There, they waited until midnight, during which time the Serbs were collecting all non-Serbs around Prijedor and delivering them to the football field. O.U. continued:

Before we left, two soldiers came and started to provoke us. They introduced themselves and said, "Do you know who we are?" We said we did not know. They told us they were Arkan's men. They were wearing caps, just normal civilian caps, and insignias of the Bosnian Serb flag.⁷⁰ They took two women and demanded money. We gave them some, and they demanded more. Then they returned the women. We also had to collect money on the bus: soldiers were looking for 400 or 500 German marks, and we had to collect that amount.

But nothing really happened until Teslić. There, the Serbs stopped the bus, and two military policeman came aboard; we knew they were military police because they had white belts. The military police officers said that we needed money to cross into Bosnian government-controlled territory. We said we gave our money to Arkan's people. Then they went through the bus

⁷⁰ Most probably these were not Arkan's troops. No one else reported Arkan's men in the Prijedor area. Moreover, Arkan's men have an insignia that says "Serbian volunteers" on the outside and has a tiger in the middle, and their heads are shaved. It is more likely that these were Bosnian Serb soldiers who simply told this group they were Arkan's men in order to frighten them.

checking our documents. They took five men, including my husband, from the bus and then returned to ask the wives of those men to step out. I left the bus. They told us each that if we gave them 500 German marks, they would release our husbands. We said we didn't have 500 German marks, and the men said to give them 400 marks; we said we didn't have the money and they demanded 300 marks. I personally had no money, but some women were able to give 500 German marks. These men ended up taking the money and our husbands. There was a small truck parked nearby, and they put a group of men, including our husbands, aboard. I believe around fifteen men were taken from my convoy that day. I don't know anything about my husband. I don't know where the men were taken.

D.D.,⁷¹ a man from Ljubija, recounted how he narrowly escaped being forcibly taken off a bus carrying civilians. One month prior to being expelled, a family from Grahovo moved into his house. Ten days after the Serbian family arrived, D.D.'s family was told that they would have to leave. According to D.D.:

At that point, a policeman sent us back to our house. He told us the Muslims were not supposed to leave, only the Croats had to. But the second time around, on October 10, the four of us had to pay 200 German marks each to leave the city. We had to borrow the money. Every night, the Serbs living in the house locked the door. But the night before we left, they left it unlocked. They probably knew what was to happen. At 3:00 a.m., one soldier wearing a camouflage uniform with an automatic weapon came. He told us we would have to leave in five minutes. We had prepared some things beforehand to take with us, so we picked them up and left. The collection point was around 500 meters from our house.

There was only one bus going back and forth, taking people to the football field in Prijedor. We were probably on the fourth bus. It was so crowded that people were standing in the buses. We arrived in Prijedor around 5:00 in the morning. There were thirteen buses in the convoy which started to leave around 10:30 the following evening of October 10.

We were driven to the front line at Teslić via Banja Luka. In Teslić, they took all the military-aged men off the bus, including me. The men in the bus were elderly, so I put on some glasses and an old jacket before they took me off the bus. I also had a medical document which stated that I was not obligated to serve in the military because I had had surgery. The Serbs thought I couldn't see anything and said, "We don't need you." One soldier pulled me out of the line — there were more than thirty people in the line — and took me to my bus. He said that if I didn't find 300 German marks, I would be killed. He wanted me to ask people traveling with me for money. I collected around one hundred German marks. He counted it and realized it was not 300 German marks and gave me back the money and told me to hide someplace. The Bosnian Army soldiers couldn't believe how I succeeded in crossing.

⁷¹ Interviewed by Human Rights Watch/Helsinki representatives in Bosnia-Herzegovina, November, 1995.

Bosanska Dubica⁷²

T.N., a Muslim woman originally from Bosanska Dubica but who had lived in Australia,⁷³ returned to her hometown to take her then eight-year-old daughter back with her to Australia in 1992. But the war broke out, and T.N. felt she could not return to her hometown, which was under Bosnian Serb control. Her mother and aunt — who cared for T.N.'s daughter in her absence — were expelled from Bosanska Dubica in mid-October, but the authorities did not allow the child to accompany her grandmother and aunt. The witnesses state that families were being separated by Bosnian Serb soldiers in Bosanska Dubica. According to T.N.'s aunt:⁷⁴

As soon as they broke the doors down, they started bashing us. We didn't have time to get proper clothes; they took us in our nightgowns. There were three soldiers, and two of them took me by the arms. They were saying, "Get out, get out," and they were cursing mothers. You had to give everything you had, but you got beaten whether you had it or not.

⁷² Prior to the war, the Bosanska Dubica municipality — located on the border of Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, directly northeast of Prijedor — had a total population of 31,577 of which 69.1 percent were Serb and 20.5 percent were Muslim.

⁷³ Interviewed by Human Rights Watch/Helsinki representatives in Zenica, Bosnia-Herzegovina, November 12, 1995.

⁷⁴ Interviewed by Human Rights Watch/Helsinki representatives in Zenica, Bosnia-Herzegovina, November 12, 1995.

According to T.N.'s mother:⁷⁵

I was the first out of the house. They took whoever was on the list. The little girl was crying for me, and the soldiers wouldn't let me take her or even take my sweater. The soldier kicked me in the face. He said, "You get out of here" to B. [the daughter]. "We only need your mother." I was crying and screaming, and my brother heard me and came out and took her.

T.N.'s daughter, her uncle and another aunt remain in Bosanska Dubica, but T.N. does not know their whereabouts.

Bosanski Novi⁷⁶

S.L., a fifty-year-old woman from Bosanski Novi,⁷⁷ claimed that Arkan's paramilitaries were responsible for the latest wave of "ethnic cleansing" in Bosanski Novi. According to S.L.:

There was some fighting, and we were sure that the Fifth Corps [of the Bosnian Army] was coming close to Bosanski Novi. And then Arkan's soldiers came. They all had short hair and spoke with Serbian accents. I lived in the center of town. The Arkanovci arrived on the 22nd of September and, at about 1:00 in the morning, there was a bus standing in front of our house with Vukovar registration⁷⁸ — we saw these plates. These were the buses that brought Arkan's troops. They were breaking into people's houses. There were no Muslim villages left in the Bosanski Novi municipality.

When they came to the houses, I wasn't at home, I was hiding in another house but was later found [by the soldiers]. I was afraid they were going to kill me; I was terrorized for all three years of their aggression: I had to give my dog to the Serbs [because she had named her dog after a Serbian official and someone had reported her]. When Arkan's soldiers knocked on my door, they asked me where my dog was. They took my parents outside and then they took me in my pajamas. One of the Arkan soldiers told me just to get on the bus. They took all our documents, our jewelry and money. Old people and sick people were on the bus. All of us [gestured toward other women in room] were sent.

The woman and her parents were taken to a bus station that was being used as a detention area for non-Serbs who were to be expelled. According to S.L.:

⁷⁵ Interviewed by Human Rights Watch/Helsinki representatives in Zenica, Bosnia-Herzegovina, November 12, 1995.

⁷⁶ Bosanski Novi is located on the border between Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, northwest of Prijedor. According to the 1991 census, the population of the municipality was 41,541 of which 60.4 percent were Serbs and 33.9 percent were Muslims.

⁷⁷ Interviewed by Human Rights Watch/Helsinki representatives in Zenica, Bosnia-Herzegovina, November 21, 1995. The witness chose not to give her name and the name used here is a pseudonym.

⁷⁸ Vukovar is a city in Croatia that was besieged and destroyed, its non-Serbian population was expelled or killed by Yugoslav Army and rebel Serbian forces, in November 1991. The town of Erdut, near Vukovar, is the site of Arkan's headquarters in the Serbian-controlled, eastern Slavonian part of Croatia.

The next morning we figured we would all be killed. Near the bus station there was a field, and the Serbs were digging a big hole which we thought might be for us. We were kept in the old bus station with no windows. We were there for five days without water or food. One woman died because she had nothing to eat; she was already sick.

According to S.L., only 1,000 Muslims remained in Bosanski Novi when the most recent expulsions began. She claimed that 460 people were detained in the bus station and later expelled, and that 320 men had stayed behind and that their whereabouts were unknown.

Those detained at the bus station were then moved into houses. Approximately fifty persons were held in one house. According to S.L.:

The houses weren't guarded, but we were told not to leave the house. We were without water or food. Then some people from [the Muslim humanitarian aid agency] Merhamet came and asked if we wanted to leave. We had to pay 150 German marks if we wanted to leave but we didn't have any money — somebody had already moved into my house. Then [as an intermediary] Merhamet accepted thirty German marks to take us out. My aunt paid for my entire family.

On October 6, 1995, S.L. and her parents were put on buses, taken to a river and told to walk to Bosnian government-controlled territory. According to S.L., Serbian soldiers took their clothing and baggage. One Serbian soldier, however, helped S.L. carry her father across the river.

Doboj

Doboj is a strategically located municipality, lying in the "corridor" area that links the northwestern portions of Serb-controlled territories with regions held by Serb forces in eastern Bosnia. It has long played its part as a vital supply line for the regional Serb power center, Banja Luka. During the course of the war, brutal "ethnic cleansing" of the non-Serb population was carried out in the Doboj region,⁷⁹ and scores of non-Serbs from Bosanska Krajina area were recruited into forced labor on the front lines at Doboj in order to dig trenches and service the Bosnian Serb army.

M.L., a man from Doboj,⁸⁰ described the collection and deportation of Muslims from the Doboj area in late September:

On September 21, at about 7:00 p.m., they knocked on my door and told me I had ten minutes to move out. So we were moved out in front of the building with my wife and two children, aged sixteen and eighteen. Two civilian policemen came [to our house], but they were not from Doboj — I would have known them if they were from Doboj. Serbs were standing at the front door, waiting to move in. We spent the night at a friend's house. It was a complete surprise, because two days earlier, they had picked up all the

⁷⁹ Before the war Doboj had a population of 102,546 of which 40.2 percent were Muslim, 13 percent were Croats and 39 percent were Serbs.

⁸⁰ Interviewed by Human Rights Watch/Helsinki representatives in Zenica, Bosnia-Herzegovina, November 20, 1995. The man chose not to disclose his name and the name used here is a pseudonym.

Muslim men from the workplaces in the town and took them to [Mount] Ozren and made them work, apparently at the front lines.

The next day, people started to come to the playground as a group; we were ordered to do so. Seven buses came, and we were dropped somewhere in the forest, and from that point we walked on foot to [the Bosnian government-controlled city of] Maglaj. We drove by bus for about one hour. We were dropped off at 6:00 p.m. and we walked all night to Maglaj. From the sides of the column there were Serbian soldiers; we couldn't see them but we could see the lights of their cigarettes. Some of them were stopping people and robbing them. Some stopped me and told me they would kill me. They asked me what was in my bag, and I told them it was only my clothes. They asked if there was anything important [inside the bag], and I told them there was nothing important, and after ten meters they made me leave my bag. I had winter clothing in the bag. That happened to all the people in the line, and money was taken from many of them. We arrived only with the clothes we had on our backs.

Bosanska Gradiška⁸¹

Human Rights Watch/Helsinki representatives interviewed a Muslim family⁸² from Bosanska Gradiška that explained the harassment, torture and subsequent expulsion they faced after local and refugee Serbs retaliated against them following the Croatian Army's offensive against the Serbian-held area of Krajina in Croatia. E.S., a fifteen-year-old boy, and seven other young men were arbitrarily arrested by men who may have been military police officers. They were detained and tortured during their internment. According to E.S.:

On August 10, at about 5:00 p.m., I was not at home, I was at a friend's house. Then a man came to my house looking for me. He came in a blue and white van which said "military police" on it. There were four military police officers inside the van. One of them was seen looking at a list. We knew these men; we knew their faces but not their names. At that time I arrived [home], and he [the police officer] asked, "Are you E.S.?" I said, "I am," and showed him my student ID. They started to beat me up right on the street with their hands. I fell down, and one of them asked me, "Why are you on the ground?" I got up, and he hit me again. He told me to get in the van, and he hit me again. They already had seven other young men in the van. We had to put our hands behind our heads and look down. Two of us were the youngest; we were both fifteen.⁸³

They took us across the street to the police station and lined us up against the wall. All the people they had on the list were beaten up. We were accused of screaming or yelling certain things. They asked you if you did these things,

⁸¹ The Bosanska Gradiška municipality is located on the northern border of Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia, directly north of Banja Luka. Its pre-war population was 60,062, of which 89.1 percent were Serbs and 4.3 percent were Muslims.

⁸² Interviewed by Human Rights Watch/Helsinki representatives in Zagreb, Croatia, November 10, 1995. The family chose not to give their name and the names used here are pseudonyms.

⁸³ The other fifteen-year-old referred to by the witness was the witness's cousin, who sat through part of the interview.

and if you said no, you got a double beating. They beat us up and made us act out our "crimes" by screaming and yelling. Then they sent us to clean hallways and toilets, and one man made us lick his boots. Then they told us our job wasn't good enough. The others [the six older youths who were also taken into custody] were sent to be beaten upstairs with a baseball bat. They beat us with a rubber hose that was flexible. They beat us with those on our backs; I was lucky because I had on a jacket. Most of the beatings were on our bare feet. We had to kneel on the floor with our hands behind our heads and put our heads on the floor while they beat our feet; if you screamed you got twenty or thirty more hits. There were three or four of us that were beaten with the rubber hose. They hit us with their hands on our necks. There were two Croats with us — they may still be in Bosanska Gradiška. There were approximately twenty men, and they would beat you five at a time, and they took turns beating us. These soldiers were angry at us. After we were beaten, we were told to go downstairs to clean again. The room we were in resembled a two-meter-wide hallway. The floor was covered with something. We weren't allowed to look up. We had to sing their songs, and if you didn't know the song, they sang it and then you had to sing it. We saw blood on the walls; we had to clean it. Five minutes before ten, they let us go home, and we couldn't even walk. They said we had five minutes to get home or they would beat us again. I remembered there was one Muslim lady I knew nearby, and I asked her for a bicycle [to get home.]

After their detention, beating and release, some of the men were called back to the police station on a daily basis, where they were beaten again. According to E.S.:

If you didn't show up, they would come and find you. On August 15, they took us again, but this time the civilian police came and made us say we weren't beaten. They made us sign statements that we weren't beaten, and we had to sign a confession. They beat us again and made us promise not to tell anyone, but everyone knew what had happened. Some of our Serbian neighbors said they wanted to help, but they were afraid. Then they [the police officers] asked us if we wanted to go to school, and we said, "Yes," and they beat us. They asked us again [whether we wanted to go to school], and we said, "No," and they beat us. No matter what we said, they beat us. The military police told us, "If we bring you here one more time, you will be in the Sava," meaning they would kill us and throw our bodies in the Sava river.

According to E.S., approximately 800 Muslims remain in, but want to leave, Bosanska Gradiška.

CONCLUSIONS

Bosnian Serb-held areas of northwestern Bosnia have long been the site of organized, indeed institutionalized, discrimination and terrorization of non-Serbs. The area was immune from fighting until September 1995, but nevertheless, from 1992 on, most Muslims, Croats, and other non-Serbs or opponents of the rebel-Serb regime were executed, disappeared, expelled or deported from their homes. The most recent abuses which are described in this report were perpetrated as an alleged reaction to offensives by Croatian and Bosnian

government forces, but these abuses are only the continuation of a policy of "ethnic cleansing" that began in 1992.

As in past instances, paramilitary units from Serbia proper appear to have assisted the local Bosnian Serb officials in "cleansing" the area of non-Serbs and opponents of the Republika Srpska regime. Forces belonging to Arkan were most probably in the area by mid-September and appear to have been responsible for many of the abuses perpetrated during subsequent weeks. If Arkan's forces were indeed responsible for these abuses, Serbian President Slobodan Milošević must also share substantial responsibility. His police forces armed and trained Arkan's forces in the early 1990s and have allowed Arkan and his forces to be trained and based, and to recruit openly, in Serbia proper since then. What is more, Arkan's forces repeatedly committed brutal abuses in Bosnia-Herzegovina and have been allowed to return to Serbia proper without fear of arrest or prosecution. If Arkan and his paramilitaries are indicted for war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide, the international community must insist that President Milošević extradite those persons and provide all necessary assistance to the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia.

In recent months, President Milošević has been courted by the international community in order to bring about a peace accord for Bosnia-Herzegovina. While we understand that diplomacy requires dealing with all sides to bring about an end to the fighting, we also believe that justice is an integral part of any peace. To that end, President Milošević's role either in planning the extermination or expulsion of non-Serbs or, more clearly, his support for military, paramilitary and police forces engaged in such abuses must be investigated and, if there is evidence of such abuses, he must be held accountable for his crimes, irrespective of his role in the negotiating process.

Although this report highlights abuses in northwestern Bosnia from late August to November 1995, the fate of those who have been disappeared in the past four years and non-Serbs who remain in the area should not be forgotten now that the Dayton peace accord has been signed. Rather, the deployment of the IFOR and an elaborate civilian monitoring mechanism should work to improve human rights by ensuring the safety of those non-Serbs who remain in the area and those who wish to return. However, respect for the rule of law and human rights, including the rights of minorities, cannot be effected until those responsible for the abuses of the past four years are removed from their posts, held accountable for their crimes and replaced by persons who will respect the most basic rules of humane conduct.

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This report is based on a mission conducted by Diane Paul, research associate with Human Rights Watch/Helsinki, and Patricia Reed, consultant to Human Rights Watch/Helsinki from November 6 - 30, 1995. This report was written by Ivan Lupis, research assistant, Ivana Nizich, research associate, and Diane Paul, and edited by Holly Cartner, executive director of Human Rights Watch/Helsinki, and Cynthia Brown, program director for Human Rights Watch. Anne Kuper provided invaluable production assistance.

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