

# **Bosnia Fact Sheet: Human Rights Abuses in the Balkans**

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## **Human Rights Abuses**

- The war in the former Yugoslavia has involved widespread violations of human rights and humanitarian law, including mass killings and murder, systematic rape, torture, and other crimes against humanity.
- The term "ethnic cleansing" has entered the world's vocabulary to describe the horrifying range of human rights abuses--from forcible expulsion to murder--committed in parts of the former Yugoslavia in order to achieve "ethnic purity."
- All parties to the conflict in the Balkans have committed human rights violations, but the great majority have been perpetrated by Serb forces. Some of the worst incidents include the following:
  - In the fall of 1991, Serb forces shelled the Croatian coastal city of Dubrovnik, an action without military justification.
  - Throughout the course of the conflict, Sarajevo and other cities have been subjected to indiscriminate shelling. Scores of civilians have been killed or wounded by snipers and cluster and napalm bombs used by Bosnian Serb forces. Six of these cities were designated safe areas by the United Nations in May 1993. This did not stop the shelling.
  - Beginning in the spring of 1995, entire enclaves, ranging in size from towns such as Prijedor, Bijeljina, Zvornik, and Jajce, to hamlets such as Foca and Cerska, were "cleansed" of their Muslim and Croat residents in a Bosnian Serb attempt to "purify" lands they controlled.
  - In November 1991, Krajina Serbs took several hundred wounded Croatian soldiers from a hospital in the eastern Slavonian town of Vukovar, shot them in a field, and buried them in a mass grave. Serb authorities continue to deny international forensic teams access to the site.
  - In 1992, the Bosnian Serbs set up a gulag of prison camps and detention facilities holding tens of thousands of Muslims and Croats. During the summer of 1992, international investigators were denied access to detainees, but those who escaped described repeated atrocities.
  - During the summer of 1995, Bosnian Serb forces overran Srebrenica and Zepa, committing serious violations of human rights. As many as 6,000 male Muslim detainees were shot and buried in mass graves. The entire Muslim population of more than 42,000 people was "cleansed" from the region.
  - Evidence is mounting that human rights abuses were committed against Serb civilians in Croatia in mid-1995, when the Croatian military retook Serb-occupied western Slavonia and the Krajina region.

## **The Response of the International Community**

- In August 1995, the UN Commission on Human Rights established a Special Rapporteur to conduct on-site investigations into human rights violations and report on his findings. The Special Rapporteur maintains human rights monitors in Sarajevo, Mostar, Skopje, and Zagreb and has submitted a series of reports on violations throughout the former Yugoslavia.
- In October 1992, the UN Security Council approved an impartial international investigation to identify persons responsible for human rights abuses and to discourage more ethnic-based violence. The resulting Commission of Experts documented thousands of crimes.
- In the spring of 1993, the Security Council concluded that the atrocities committed amounted to war crimes and that international prosecution of individuals responsible for atrocities was integral to the prospects for long-term peace. As a result, it established a War Crimes Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. The Tribunal subsumed the Commission of Experts and took over the task of amassing data on abuses.

--The War Crimes Tribunal has issued indictments against 53 persons, including Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic and Bosnian Serb General Ratko Mladic. Proceedings have begun against the first defendant--a Bosnian Serb official accused of committing atrocities at a prison camp.

- In August 1995, after the Bosnian Serbs attacked the Sarajevo safe area and rejected UN and NATO conditions for a heavy-weapons withdrawal, NATO undertook its most intense air and artillery campaign to date, using the new authority and improved procedures agreed to in London.
- Neither Radovan Karadzic, Ratko Mladic, nor any other indicted war criminal was permitted to participate in the Dayton proximity peace talks or in any other international peace negotiations. The United States has consistently opposed and continues to oppose amnesty for indicted war criminals. As warrants are issued, nations will be obliged to arrest indictees in their jurisdictions.

### **What the United States Has Done**

- The United States led international efforts to establish and support the War Crimes Tribunal and has contributed more to the Tribunal than any other nation-- upwards of \$12 million. This includes financial contributions of nearly \$9 million and the services of more than 20 prosecutors, investigators, and other experts.
- The U.S. took the lead in gathering concrete evidence about the atrocities that took place in and around Srebrenica. Assistant Secretary for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor John Shattuck has traveled to the region to interview refugees and secure first-hand information about human rights violations; and Assistant Secretary for Population, Refugees, and Migration Phyllis Oakley has traveled there to help provide the necessary emergency humanitarian assistance to victims.
- Armed with concrete information, Secretary Christopher presented U.S.-gathered evidence of human rights atrocities to the participants at the London Conference

- in July and pressed for a more forceful military role in the region. Ambassador Albright also presented evidence to the UN Security Council.
- Under the U.S.-brokered cease-fire of October 1995, the parties agreed to treat civilians and prisoners humanely, to exchange prisoners of war under UN supervision, to afford all persons freedom of movement, and to guarantee the right of displaced persons to return home and reclaim their property.
  - In November 1995, the United States convened the parties in Dayton, Ohio, and, together with the Contact Group, succeeded in negotiating a peace agreement.
  - The Agreement commits the parties in Bosnia and Herzegovina to respect the highest level of internationally recognized human rights, to grant human rights monitors unrestricted access to their territory, to cooperate with the ICRC in the search for missing persons, and to release all persons detained in relation to the conflict. It creates a Human Rights Commission to investigate and to act upon human rights violations. Refugees and displaced persons will have the right to return home or to obtain just compensation. The agreement creates a Commission of Refugees and Displaced Persons to adjudicate claims.
  - The Agreement reaffirms that justice is an integral part of the process for national reconciliation by obligating the parties to cooperate with the War Crimes Tribunal and promising that those who have committed crimes against humanity, genocide, and war crimes will be brought to justice.
  - Evidence of human rights abuses gathered by the United States continues to be made available to the War Crimes Tribunal. Bringing an end to human rights abuses is a primary purpose of the peace process.

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