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@HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA AND KOSOVO

Human rights violations are continuing in war-torn Bosnia-Herzegovina, Amnesty International said today - and warned of a human rights crisis developing elsewhere in the former Yugoslavia, in Kosovo province.

The human rights organization sent a fact-finding team to interview scores of refugees who had fled from the killings, beatings and arrests in Bosnia-Herzegovina or who had been forcibly expelled. They gave Amnesty International firsthand reports in graphic detail, adding to the widespread media reports of ill-treatment in detention camps and killings by Serbian forces, as well as new information about violations against Serbs.

In a report released today, young people describe seeing their parents shot dead, villagers tell how they were rounded up and held in sports stadiums, cellars and trains, and former detainees recount the savage beatings they suffered.

"Because of the war it has been extremely difficult to get eye-witness information and corroborating evidence about what has been going on in Bosnia-Herzegovina," said Amnesty International, "and we have details of many more incidents which we haven't been able to verify. Probably no one will ever know the full extent of the human rights violations which have taken place, but it is clear that they have been horrific - and should be stopped now."

New reports are still arriving at Amnesty International, documenting the continuing violations in Bosnia-Herzegovina. What is more, the organization is increasingly disturbed by information coming in on a daily basis about repression, arrests and beatings in Kosovo province, carried out by the largely Serbian security forces against the majority ethnic Albanians. The latter have proclaimed Kosovo a republic and refuse to recognise Serbian authority.

Amnesty International warns that the tensions seen in Kosovo province between Serbs and ethnic Albanians risk flaring up into catastrophic inter-ethnic violence of the kind already seen in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Today's report gives detailed, authenticated accounts of refugees' experiences in prison camps, and eye-witness reports of targeted killings of Muslims in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

One 15-year-old girl told Amnesty International how she had seen her father become one of at least 83 Muslims massacred in one village. She and her sister had seen Serbian fighters shoot at her father and two neighbours, who were trying to escape, before he was driven back with a rifle at his back.

"He told us not to be frightened, that nothing would happen," she said. Moments later he was shot dead and the men began to fire at her and her sister. They ran into the house while the men fired through the windows. "They fired so much," said the girl, "that when they had stopped, they thought they had killed us."

Other people were reportedly killed in detention camps, where conditions for all detainees were frequently very poor. Often prisoners were beaten regularly and severely, food was scarce and detainees were reportedly humiliated by their guards. A Catholic priest whose case is detailed in the report was beaten and kicked even before he arrived at the detention centre - once there, he was beaten senseless, leaving him bruised from head to toe.

"The accounts in this report, unfortunately, reflect just a fraction of the whole picture," said Amnesty International. "We are still looking into reports of rape of women detainees and the many new incidents that come to our attention each week.

"Meanwhile, the situation in Kosovo is getting worse and worse, while the eyes of the world are focused on Bosnia-Herzegovina. Human rights are being grossly abused in both areas.

"The situation in the former Yugoslavia is tragic. Everybody who can should take steps to end the human rights violations that contribute to that tragedy."