

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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Bosnia and Herzegovina: Fourteen years is too long to wait for justice

It is 14 years this week since Colonel Avdo Palić, a war-time commander of the Army of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Armija Bosne i Hercegovine, ABiH) was forcibly taken away from the UN Protection Forces (UNPROFOR) compound in Žepa in eastern Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) by soldiers from the Bosnian Serb Army (Vojska Republike Srpske, VRS). He had gone to the compound to negotiate the evacuation of civilians from the town which had surrendered to the VRS and was never seen again. His fate and whereabouts are still unknown.

Amnesty International is concerned that the BiH authorities have failed to clarify the fate of Avdo Palić, identify the location of his mortal remains, and bring those responsible for his enforced disappearance to justice. This failure is causing additional suffering to his family who continue to live in a state of uncertainty.

On 23 July 2009, several members of the BiH House of Representatives, including Remzija Kadrić, Adem Huskić and Ekrem Ajanović called on the international community as represented by the Office of the High Representative (OHR – the chief civilian peace implementation agency in the country) and the European Commission to engage more actively in the Colonel Avdo Palić case and put pressure on the authorities of Republika Srpska (RS), one of the two semi-autonomous entities that make up BiH, to unveil the truth about Colonel Avdo Palić's fate and whereabouts.

On 27 July 2009 the OHR called on the government of RS to ensure that the body of Avdo Palić was found and returned to the family for a dignified burial. The OHR reminded the authorities that in January 2001, the Human Rights Chamber of BiH had ordered the RS authorities to carry out a full investigation into the fate of Colonel Avdo Palić from the date of his enforced disappearance, with a view to bringing the perpetrators to justice and returning his remains to his loved ones.

Despite numerous promises and fruitless efforts, this task remains to be fulfilled by the BiH authorities. The case has now been brought before the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg.

Almost 14 years after the end of the war in BiH, Amnesty International is seriously concerned about the continuing impunity for enforced disappearances and other violations of human rights and international humanitarian law committed during the war. The organization is also concerned about the continuing lack of justice and redress for the victims of these violations and their relatives. Thousands of people are still reported as missing.

Amnesty International is calling on the BiH authorities to take meaningful steps to tackle impunity, to ensure that individual cases of enforced disappearances and extrajudicial executions are promptly, independently and impartially investigated, and those responsible brought to justice in fair proceedings. The organization is further urging the authorities to ensure that the families of the disappeared receive reparations, including compensation, restitution, rehabilitation, satisfaction and guarantees of non-repetition.

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