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CROATIA: AMNESTY SEEKS PRESIDENT TUDJMAN'S ASSURANCES THAT REFUGEES FROM VELIKA KLADUŠA ARE NOT FORCIBLY RETURNED

Amnesty International is concerned about the fate of about 30.000 refugees from the Velika Kladuša region of Bosnia who have been under the control of the Croatian Army near Vojnič in Croatia since 8 August.

In a letter to the president of the Croatian Republic, Franjo Tudjman, Amnesty International said it fears that these people may be at risk of human rights violations including arbitrary detention, torture and ill-treatment if forced to return to Bosnia by the Croatian Government.

"Acts of retribution cannot be ruled out as the refugees include combatants that fought on the side of Fikret Abdić's forces who are considered traitors by the Bosnian Government," Amnesty International said. "Anyone who fears that they may suffer human rights violations if they return should be given a fair chance to claim asylum in Croatia."

As a party to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, Croatia is obliged not to forcibly return any person to a country where he or she risks serious human rights violations.

Amnesty International also expressed deep concern about allegations that men have been taken away by soldiers of the Bosnian army from the camp near Vojnič. Their fate and whereabouts are unknown.

Amnesty International calls upon President Tudjman to ensure that Bosnian soldiers or police should not be given access to the refugees while they remain in Croatia.

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