

Croatia: Minister of Interior should answer on specific cases

Zagreb- The Ministry of Interior's response to our latest report on Croatia only raises more questions than answers, Amnesty International said today, challenging the Ministry to elaborate on its 'response' about the real number of killings committed in the Krajina in 1995.

According to a television broadcast on 4 August, the Croatian Ministry of Interior refuted the accuracy of the statistics provided by Amnesty International in its report "Croatia: Impunity for killings after Storm", issued yesterday (AI Index: EUR 64/04/98). Responding to the organization's queries about government statistics which cited more than 450 civilian deaths, the Ministry of Interior stated that it had documented 47 cases of killings.

Of that number, the Minister of Interior claimed approximately half were resolved and that special instructions had been given to police officers in the Krajina after operation Storm had ended on 8 August 1995 to protect the Croatian Serb civilian population remaining there.

Amnesty International is asking the Minister of Interior to respond to these specific questions:

- C How does the number of 47 killings relate to the 53 people charged or under investigation in June 1996, in particular since some of them were suspected of more than one act of murder?
- C Where are the autopsy reports for the more than 400 other civilians the authorities themselves reported had been killed?
- C Why were bodies which have been allegedly buried in official grave sites not there when relatives sought the transfer of remains to family plots?
- C If the policing authorities were under such strict instructions as alleged by the Ministry of Interior, why did some testify in court that they had "informal orders" to shoot at anything which moved?
- C Why, in June 1996, did the United Nations report that Croatian police officers did not pursue investigations into other cases when provided with specific details about the perpetrators?

"The statistics and vague statements such as those offered by the Ministry of Interior are precisely the type of meaningless information which are unacceptable as an answer from the Croatian authorities," Amnesty International said.

When Amnesty International delegates in May pursued follow-up information on the results of the investigations or charges against 53 people - statistics offered by the government in 1996 - the authorities only provided information on six individuals who had been convicted and sentenced in final court decisions - two of whom were Croatian Serbs accused of killing other Croatian Serbs in non-politically motivated acts (one was a failed dual suicide, the other a vendetta killing).

"The cases cited in the document are only a scratch on the surface of the cases which have been brought to the attention of the authorities," Amnesty International said.

However, it is not necessary to look to Amnesty International's information to discover that the numbers of unlawful deaths far exceeds the 47 cited by the Ministry of Interior. In addition to the more than 200 such cases documented by intergovernmental organizations and brought to the authorities' attention in 1995 and 1996, human rights organizations within Croatia, in particular the Croatian Helsinki Committee for Human Rights, have been documenting many more.

"What we want is specific information on the specific cases which we have cited," Amnesty International said.

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