

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

AI Index: 70/02/92

Distr: UA/SC

UA 356/92 Hostage-taking/Fear of deliberate and arbitrary killings

16 November 1992

YUGOSLAVIA (Serbia):

Ramiz Begovif	Mehmed Šebo
Hajrudin Sajtarevif	Alija Mandal
Mithad Softif	Nedo Hodñif
Derviš Softif	Nedo Hodzic's wife (name unknown to Amnesty International)
Mustafa Bajramovif	Nusret Dñinif
Mujo Alihodñif	Esad Dñinif
Sejo Pecikoza	
Medredin Hodñif	
Ramahudin , atovif	Sabahudin , atovif
Zafer Hodñif	

On 22 October 1992, the above 16 Sandñak Muslims, one of them a woman, from the village of Sjeverin in the Republic of Serbia, were abducted by some eight armed and masked men who stopped the bus on which they were travelling to work in the neighbouring Serbian town of Priboj. They were abducted in the village of Mio...e which is on the territory of the Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina. (Part of the route from Sjeverin to Priboj crosses territory of Bosnia-Herzegovina held by Bosnian Serbs.) The masked men reportedly forced all Muslim passengers out of the bus and drove them away in a covered truck without licence plates in the direction of Višegrad, in Serbian-held territory in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The captured Muslims were allegedly told that no harm would come to them, and that they would be exchanged for Serbs captured by Muslim forces. Sabahudin , atovic reportedly "disappeared" from his home in Sjeverin the previous night.

None of the 17 named above have been seen since then. However, two days later, the Belgrade newspaper Borba, citing military sources in Serbia, reported that on the day of the abduction the 17 Muslims were killed in the neighbourhood of Višegrad. However, neither the authorities of Serbia, nor those in Serbian-held territories of Bosnia-Herzegovina, have confirmed this. On 24 October the President of Yugoslavia formed a state commission to investigate the "disappearances".

On 26 October Milan Lukif, leader of Serbian paramilitary forces operating in the Višegrad area and one of his men, Dragutin Dragi...evif, were arrested by the police of Serbia while travelling through the village of Sjeverin and detained in the town of Uñica. Although it was announced that they were being held on suspicion that they had carried out the abduction, it was subsequently revealed that in fact they had not been investigated on this charge. They were soon released on the grounds that there was no evidence against them. Serbian and federal officials have stated that their possibilities of pursuing and prosecuting those responsible for the abduction are restricted because the crime was carried out on the territory of another, internationally recognized, state.

The leaders of the "Serbian Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina" reportedly deny that there are paramilitary forces operating in territory they hold and refer to Milan Lukif and his paramilitary forces as "volunteers" fighting under the command of the Višegrad brigade. In practice, however, according to Borba, Milan Lukif's forces, which enjoy considerable popular support amongst Serbs in the Višegrad area because of their military successes against Muslim forces, are beyond the control of the army or local authorities in Višegrad.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Sandžak region, with a population of between 350,000 and 440,000 (over half Slav Muslims) includes border areas of Serbia and Montenegro and adjoins Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Page 2 of UA 356/92

Since the outbreak of hostilities in the Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina, the situation in the Sandžak has been tense and local leaders have warned of the danger that Sandžak might be drawn into the Bosnian conflict. Muslim leaders have pointed to the presence of armed paramilitaries from Serbia, Serbian-held territories of Bosnia-Herzegovina and Montenegro in the area, and to the increasingly frequent reports of the intimidation of local Muslims, including physical attacks. Large numbers of Muslims have fled the area because local authorities have been unable, or unwilling, to guarantee their safety. At the same time, a considerable number of Muslim refugees from Bosnia-Herzegovina have come into the region. In October the Chief of General Staff of the Army of Yugoslavia claimed that 15,000 Muslims in the Sandžak had armed themselves; other sources in Serbia claim that over 1,500 Sandžak Muslims have joined Muslim forces fighting in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Muslim leaders have denied this.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express and airmail letters either in English, German or French or in your own language:

- expressing concern at the reported "disappearance" of the above 17 Muslims from Sjeverin following their abduction by paramilitary forces on 22 October 1992;
- expressing concern that despite reports, apparently based on military sources in Serbia, that the 17 were killed on 22 October in the neighbourhood of Višegrad, the state commission formed by the President of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SRJ) has reportedly so far not visited Višegrad, nor has it apparently been able to obtain any further information concerning the fate of the 17;
- urging the fullest cooperation by military, police and judicial authorities of the SRJ, the Republic of Serbia and representatives of the Serbs in Bosnia-Herzegovina with a view to the rapid release of the 17, if they are detained, or - if this is not the case - the clarification of their fate;
- urging that those responsible for their abduction be detained and brought to justice.

APPEALS TO

1) President of the SRJ, Head of State:

Prof. dr Dobrica ,osif
Predsednik SRJ
Bulevar Lenjina 2
11070 Beograd, Yugoslavia

Telexes: 11062 siv yu

Faxes: 38-11-636775

Salutation: Dear President ,osif

Biro Republike Srpske

Moše Pijade 8

11000 Beograd, Yugoslavia

Salutation: Dear Dr Karadžić

2) Chief of General Staff of the Army of Yugoslavia:

General Đivota Panić
Na...elnik Generalštaba Vojske Jugoslavije
Kneza Miloša 37,
Beograd, Yugoslavia

Salutation: Dear General Panić

3) Representative of the Bosnian Serbs:

Dr Radovan Karadžić

4) Commander of Serbian forces in Bosnia-Herzegovina:

General Ratko Mladif
Biro Republike Srpske
Moše Pijade 8
11000 Beograd, Yugoslavia
Salutation: Dear General Mladif

5) Minister of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Serbia:

Zoran Sokolovif
Ministar unutrašnjih poslova Republike Srbije
Kneza Miloša 101
11000 Beograd, Yugoslavia
Salutation: Dear Minister

COPIES OF YOUR APPEALS TO:

Federal Minister for Human Rights and National Minorities:

Savezni ministar za ljudska prava i nacionalne manjine
Dr Mom...ilo Gruba...
Bulevar Lenjina 2
11070 Beograd

Faxes: + 38 11 636 775 or + 38 11 195 244

and to diplomatic representatives of Yugoslavia accredited to your country

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 28 December 1992