

F.R.Y: Vukovar war crime suspects must be surrendered to the Hague

Amnesty International today called on President Kostunica to arrest and transfer three indicted war crime suspects, Mile Mrksic, Veselin Sljivancanin and Miroslav Radic, to the custody of the International Criminal Tribunal for former Yugoslavia in the Hague. Today marks the ninth anniversary of the fall of the Croatian town of Vukovar.

"The impunity that these men have enjoyed for nine years is an insult to the suffering of the victims and their families and an offence to natural justice," Amnesty International said today.

The three men were officers in the former Yugoslav People's Army (JNA), which took control over Vukovar in 1991. The town fell to the JNA following a three-month siege in the armed conflict between Croatian armed forces and the JNA, reinforced by Serb paramilitaries. Mile Mrksic and Veselin Sljivancanin were promoted after the fall of Vukovar.

The three were publicly indicted by the Tribunal in 1995 for their command and individual responsibility for war crimes committed in Vukovar.

Amnesty International urges the government in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia to surrender the men immediately and unconditionally to the custody of the Tribunal.

"President Kostunica and his government should take their readmittance to the United Nations seriously and fulfil their obligations accordingly," Amnesty International said.

Background

Following the capture of the Vukovar town centre on 18 October 1991, the JNA and the Croatian government agreed that the sick, wounded and civilians seeking refuge at the hospital, would be evacuated to Croat-held territory.

On 19 October, JNA units entered the hospital. On 20 November - while medical staff were discussing the evacuation with Major Veselin Sljivancanin - JNA units and Serb paramilitaries loaded at least 260 patients, staff and other civilians onto buses. They were transported to a farm-building at nearby Ovcara, where they were beaten for several hours, then taken by truck to a field where they were executed, and buried with a bulldozer.

In 1996, 200 bodies - including those of two women - were exhumed from a mass grave at Ovcara by investigators working for the Tribunal. Autopsies confirmed that the victims had died from multiple gun-shot wounds consistent with an execution-style killing.

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For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566

Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW web : <http://www.amnesty.org>

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