

VIEW FROM THE HAGUE

POLITICIANS AND MEDIA MORE INTERESTED IN ACCUSED THAN VICTIMS

Many politicians from Serbia constantly repeat that the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia is not interested in Serb victims. The truth is in fact the opposite. They are the ones who do not care about those victims.

How else can one explain the fact that those same politicians have most probably never heard of Milka Petko, D Mitar Rašuo, Boja Vujnović, Nedeljko Radić or many others whose names are on lists of victims collected by the ICTY?

Milka Petko, D Mitar Rašuo, Boja Vujnović and Nedeljko Radić are just some of the many Serbian victims of the wars in the former Yugoslavia, and whose names are included in indictments against those who are considered responsible for the crimes committed against them. However, unlike with Veselin Šlijančanin, Ljubiša Beara, Vladimir Lazarević, Nebojša Pavković and others, there is no space for these victims in the speeches of politicians or in the press in Serbia. It seems that politicians and the press are mainly interested in those people who are accused before the Tribunal.

This is why we will attempt to provide here at least a little information to the readers of this column.

Between 5 and 12 August 1995, 70 year-old Milka Petko and 81 year-old D Mitar Rašuo were shot in the village of Žagrović in the Knin municipality of Croatia. They are two of the victims whose names are listed in the indictment against Croatian Army Generals Ante Gotovina and Ivan Čermak, and Croatian Special police commander Mladen Markač. These three accused are charged with the murders of at least 150 Serb civilians, including Ms. Petko and Mr. Rašuo, as well as responsibility for beating and physically assaulting others. They are also charged with deporting or forcibly displacing tens of thousands of Serbs from the Krajina region of Croatia, and with damaging, destroying or looting their property. The indictment alleges that they were part of a joint criminal enterprise, together with late Croatian President Franjo Tuđman, whose purpose was to force Serb civilians to leave the territory of Croatia and never return. Both Ivan Čermak and Mladen Markač are in the Tribunal's custody. Ante Gotovina is at large.

Boja Vujnović was burned alive between 9 and 17 September 1993 in the Medak Pocket region of Croatia. She is one of the victims named in the Tribunal indictment against Croatian Army officer Mirko Norac and Croatian General Rahim Ademi. According to this indictment, Croatian army and police forces killed, terrorised, beat and mistreated Serb civilians and destroyed and looted their homes. The indictment alleges that Croatian forces under the control of the accused completely destroyed the Serb villages in the Medak Pocket. Both Norac and Ademi have appeared before the Tribunal to enter their pleas.

Nedeljko Radić was severely beaten in the police station in Srebrenica between 24 September and 16 October 1992. Mr. Radić is one of the victims in the indictment against Bosnian Muslim commander Naser Orić. According to the indictment, guards under Orić's control punched and kicked Mr. Radić, beat him about the head with an iron bar, and forcibly extracted his teeth with rusty pliers. Orić is charged with command responsibility for physically mistreating Mr. Radić and other prisoners in the Srebrenica police station, and killing a number of them. Orić is currently standing trial.

Why is public interest focused on the accused and not the victims? Why is it that the public in Serbia knows the names of Serb accused, and is not able to name individuals accused of crimes committed against Serb victims? Why is it that during events to mark the anniversary of Operation Storm, not a single politician noted the fact that the Tribunal issued an indictment against three top Croatian army and police officers for crimes committed against Serb civilians, an indictment which also names the late Croatian President Franjo Tudjman as a co-perpetrator, that two accused surrendered to the Tribunal and that the Tribunal insists equally on the arrest of Ante Gotovina as it does on Ratko Mladić and all other accused?

The Tribunal neither asks for nor accepts praise from politicians when it issues an indictment. However, to condemn the Tribunal for being an anti-Serb court and not acknowledge the work that the Tribunal is doing to bring to justice individuals who are alleged to have committed crimes against Serb civilians will not contribute to peace and reconciliation in the region.

The ICTY is not indicting individuals on the basis of their ethnicity. The Tribunal is not issuing indictments to please public opinion. The Tribunal issues indictments against individuals because there is evidence that they were involved in crimes committed against civilians and soldiers who had laid down their arms. In other words, the Tribunal issues indictments to bring justice to victims.

For this reason, all who are interested in the names and fate of many Serb victims are welcome to visit the ICTY's internet site where they can read all the indictments the Tribunal has issued to date and the judgments that the Court has handed down. In these documents they will find much more information about what happened to those victims and what the ICTY is doing in their name than they will ever get from their own media and political representatives.

Outreach Programme

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