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1995

**THE VICE-PRESIDENT OF HERCEG-BOSNA
AND FIVE OTHER PROMINENT BOSNIAN CROATS
INDICTED FOR THE “ETHNIC CLEANSING”
OF THE LASVA VALLEY AREA**

The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia announces today the indictment of the Vice-President of the Croatian Community of Herceg-Bosna (HZ-HB), of the Chief of Staff of the Croatian Defence Council (HVO) and of four other prominent members of the HZ-HB.

The six accused are allegedly responsible for *“the persecution on political, racial and religious grounds of the Bosnian Muslim population”* of the Lasva Valley area (Central Bosnia) between May 1992 and May 1993.

The crimes they are charged with were carried out on *“such a large scale and widespread basis, and implemented in such a systematic fashion”* that they have *“effectively destroyed or removed almost the entire Muslim civilian population in the Lasva Valley”*.

- **THE ACCUSED**

The six indicted accused are:

- **Dario KORDIC**
- **Tihofil (also known as Tihomir) BLASKIC**
- **Mario CERKEZ**
- **Ivan (also known as Ivica) SANTIC**
- **Pero SKOPLJAK**
- **Zlatko ALEKSOVSKI**

Dario KORDIC (born in 1960), is an influential Bosnian Croat politician who became Vice-President of the Croatian Community of Herceg-Bosna in September 1992. He still holds this position.

Tihofil BLASKIC (born in 1960), was a regional commander of the Croatian Defence Council prior to becoming the Chief of Staff of the Mostar-headquartered HVO in August 1993. .../...

Mario CERKEZ (born in 1959), was the commander of the HVO Brigade stationed in Vitez.

Ivan SANTIC (born in 1942), was the Mayor of Vitez from at least May 1992 and at all times relevant to the indictment.

Pero SKOPLJAK (born in 1943), was the Chief of Police, at the Public Security Station, of Vitez between October 1992 to May 1993. He is now an official in the Office of Dario Kordic.

Zlatko ALEKSOVSKI (born in 1960), became in January 1993 the commander of the prison facility at Kaonik prior to becoming, in May 1993, the Head of the District HVO "Heliodrom" prison of Mostar.

THE FACTS ALLEGED IN THE INDICTMENT

In 1993, following a year of formal co-operation between the Bosnian Government forces ("ABiH") and the Bosnian Croat forces ("HVO"), HVO forces attacked the Bosnian Muslim civilian population in the area of the Lasva River Valley in Central Bosnia. The civilian population in the municipality of Busovaca was attacked and generally persecuted from the end of January 1993 until at least May 1993. Some civilians were killed and many were detained. On 16 April 1993 virtually all the ABiH forces in Central Bosnia were deployed to protect the Lasva Valley by holding the frontlines against the Bosnian Serb army, situated to the east and west of the valley. As a consequence, there were virtually no ABiH forces in the valley when the HVO attacked the Bosnian Muslim civilian population. At 5.30 a.m. on 16 April 1993 the HVO launched a widespread and systematic surprise attack on the Bosnian Muslim civilians in the Lasva Valley, including the town of Vitez and numerous surrounding villages.

In one village alone approximately one thousand Bosnian Muslim civilians were detained, many of whom were forced to dig trenches on the frontlines between the Bosnian government army and the HVO forces. Some were killed in the process. Other detainees were used as human shields for the attacking HVO soldiers, over 200 women and children being placed around the HVO headquarters in Vitez which was under fire from the Bosnian government army's counter-offensive. Those Bosnian Muslim

civilians who were not detained, were either transported to the confrontation lines or made to escape from the Lasva Valley from .../...

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terror, fear and lack of food and shelter. In addition to the attack in the Lasva Valley, on 19 April 1993 the HVO in Vitez also fired 10 high explosive shells into the central shopping district of the predominantly Muslim city of Zenica, killing at least 18 and wounding at least 30 civilians.

Both preceding and following the attacks, the municipal HVO administration, in conjunction with paramilitary forces, persecuted Bosnian Muslims living in the area by attacks on Bosnian Muslim persons and property, threats of superior force, personal intimidation and demotion of Muslims in influential positions. In Busovaca municipality, the harassment and intimidation of Muslims started at least in January 1993, and continued until at least the end of May 1993. In Vitez municipality, four to five thousand Bosnian Muslim civilians were expelled from the municipality of Vitez by the April 1993 attacks, constituting basically all the Muslims in the area of the attacks. To date, the HVO still control the area, and the expelled Muslims have no homes or property and livestock to return to.

THE INVESTIGATION

In September 1994, the Office of the Prosecutor commenced an investigation into the events which occurred in the Lasva River Valley in Central Bosnia in 1993. In respect of this investigation, on 11 May 1995 a Trial Chamber of this Tribunal ordered, following an application by the Prosecutor, that the courts of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina defer their own investigations, into the Lasva Valley events, to the competence of the Tribunal.

THE CRIMES AND THE CHARGES

The crimes referred to in the indictment include, but are not limited to, :

- the bombardments and attacks of numerous undefended towns, villages and dwellings which caused the death of more than 100 Bosnian civilians in the Lasva Valley and in the city of Zenica, and which wounded many others,

- the internment of Bosnian Muslims, subjected to cruel interrogations, and physical or psychological abuses, or used for forced labour (digging of trenches) or as human shields, .../...

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- the attacks, bombardments and destruction of Bosnian Muslim businesses, buildings, personal properties and livestock, in order to kill, terrorise or demoralise the Bosnian Muslim population. Hundreds of civilians were killed or wounded in numerous locations such as Ahmici and Vitez.

Each of the accused is alleged to be individually responsible for the planning, instigation, ordering or otherwise aiding and abetting in the planning, preparation or execution of the crimes referred to in the indictment.

Each of the accused is alleged to be also criminally responsible for the acts of their subordinates: namely the accused knew, or had reason to know, that subordinates to them were about to commit crimes, or had done so, and failed to take the necessary measures to prevent such acts or to punish the perpetrators:

“By their acts or omissions” the accused are charged with:

- **Dario KORDIC** : crimes against humanity, grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions of 1949, violations of the laws or customs of war.

- **Tihofil BLASKIC** : crimes against humanity, grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions of 1949, violations of the laws or customs of war.

-**Mario CERKEZ** : grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions of 1949, violations of the laws or customs of war.

-**Ivan SANTIC, Pero SKOPLJAK** and **Zlatko ALEKSOVSKI** : a grave breach of the Geneva Conventions of 1949, a violation of the laws or customs of war.

THE INDICTMENT AND THE PROCEDURE

The Prosecutor filed this indictment with the Registry on Thursday 2 November 1995.

The indictment was reviewed by Judge Gabrielle Kirk McDonald who confirmed it on Friday 10 November 1995, and who signed warrants for the arrest of the accused.

The indictments and the warrants will be forwarded to the relevant authorities in Sarajevo, Mostar and Zagreb.
