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The Hague, 24 April 2006
CT/MOW/PA264e

The trial for the six high-level leaders of the Bosnian Croat wartime entity, Jadranko Prlic, Bruno Stojic, Slobodan Praljak, Milivoj Petkovic, Valentin Coric and Berislav Pusic will begin on Wednesday, 26 April 2006 at 2:15 p.m. in Courtroom III.

The charges against the accused focus on ethnic cleansing of Bosnian Muslims and other non-Croats from areas in the territory of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina which were claimed to be part of the so-called Herceg-Bosna, declared as a political and territorial entity in November 1991. The charges include, among others, murder, rape, sexual assault, destruction of property, imprisonment, deportation and forcible transfer. The indictment concentrates on crimes committed in the municipalities of Prozor, Gornji Vakuf, Jablanica, Mostar, Ljubuski, Stolac, Čapljina and Vares.

Background

The initial indictment against Jadranko Prlic, Bruno Stojic, Slobodan Praljak, Milivoj Petkovic, Valentin Coric and Berislav Pusic was filed and confirmed on 4 March 2004.

The indictment states that the six accused participated in a joint criminal enterprise to politically and militarily subjugate, permanently remove and ethnically cleanse Bosnian Muslims and other non-Croats who lived in areas on the territory of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina which were claimed to be part of the Croatian Community (and later Republic) of Herceg-Bosna, and to join these areas as part of a "Greater Croatia".

According to the indictment, as president, and later prime minister, of the Herceg-Bosna/HVO, Jadranko Prlic was the most powerful official, other than Mate Boban, in the Herceg-Bosna/HVO political and governmental structure. Bruno Stojic was the top political and management official in charge of the HVO armed forces. Slobodan Praljak served simultaneously as a senior Croatian Army officer, Assistant Minister of Defence and senior representative of the Croatian Ministry of Defence to the Herceg-Bosna/HVO government and armed forces, playing an important role in securing weapons and ammunition for the HVO army. Milivoj Petkovic, in his various positions and functions, exercised *de jure* and/or *de facto* command and control over the Herceg-Bosna/HVO armed forces. Valentin Coric played a key role in the establishment, administration and operation of the HVO Military Police. Berislav Pusic was president of the commission taking charge of all HVO prison and detention facilities holding prisoners of war and detainees.

The indictment alleges that in addition to the six accused, the joint criminal enterprise included Franjo Tudman, Gojko Susak, Janko Bobetko, Mate Boban, Dario Kordic, Tihomir Blaskic, Mladen Naletilic and various members and officials of the HVO, among others.

As part of the ethnic cleansing, the six accused are accused of use of force, intimidation and terror by conducting mass arrests of Bosnian Muslims who were then either murdered, beaten, sexually assaulted, robbed of their property and otherwise abused. In attacks on Muslim towns, villages and areas, there was systematic shelling and snipping of civilians. Personal property including houses and cars were taken over by the HVO. Property owned by Muslim civilians was destroyed ensuring there would be no return of the population. Prisons and detention units were set up in order to detain Bosnian Muslims, including the elderly, women and children. They were often kept in horrible conditions and deprived of basic human necessities, such as adequate food, water and medical care. Many of these detainees were then "released" only to be transferred or deported, forced to sign over property to the HVO. Many detainees were also subjected to forced labor, digging trenches, assisting in the building of military fortifications or retrieving dead bodies in dangerous combat situations.

A pre-trial conference will be held on Tuesday, April 25 2006. The six accused have been on provisional release since 9 September 2004.

Full text of the indictment can be found at

<http://www.un.org/icty/indictment/english/prl-ii040304e.htm>

All proceedings can be followed on the Tribunal's website www.un.org/icty.