

VIEW FROM THE HAGUE

SDS BADGE AFFIXED TO THE FOREHEAD OF THE ONE BEATEN TO DEATH

Hundreds of Serb civilians were between April and December 1992 detained in the Čelebići prison camp in the Konjic municipality, located between Sarajevo and Mostar. In one of the very first trials held before the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, Hazim Delić, Esad Landžo and Zdravko Mucić were convicted of involvement in killing, torturing, beating, raping, and unlawfully confining in inhumane conditions Serb civilians at the camp. The facts about these crimes were proven before the court beyond a reasonable doubt.

Last Saturday four senior Tribunal representatives traveled to Konjic to present the Tribunal's work in the Čelebići case. The audience consisted of local community leaders, and Serb victims who traveled from Višegrad and elsewhere in RS.

Those present had a chance to hear how the ICTY initially opened an investigation into the crimes at Čelebići on the basis of information received from Human Rights Watch and other organizations. Because of the lack of cooperation on part of Serb authorities in both Bosnia and Serbia, victims had to travel to neighboring countries to talk to ICTY investigators about the horrors they were exposed to in the camp. On the basis of evidence gathered during the investigation, the Tribunal's Prosecutor issued an indictment against four accused on 22 March 1996.

A large part of the conference on Saturday was devoted to testimonies of victims that had courageously testified in The Hague about the suffering of detainees at Čelebići. Among them was Grozdana Čečez, who told the court how she had been raped by Hazim Delić in front of other men. The audience watched a video recording of Mrs Čečez's testimony in which she described the event with the following words: "he trampled on my pride and I will never be able to be the woman that I was". Hazim Delić was found guilty of raping and torturing Grozdana Čečez and Milojka Antić, killing Željko Milošević, as well as cruelly treating detainees, by using a device emitting electrical current to inflict pain on them. He was sentenced to 18 years of imprisonment.

Zdravko Mucić held superior authority over the Čelebići prison-camp but failed to prevent crimes committed in the camp or to punish the perpetrators. Therefore, he was held criminally responsible for the killings of at least nine persons, as well as torture and inhumane acts, including an incident in which two brothers were forced to perform fellatio with each other.

Mucić was also found to be directly responsible for the inhumane conditions at Čelebići. It was shown during the trial that an atmosphere of terror prevailed in the camp, that the food provided was at starvation level, and that medical health and sanitary conditions

were inadequate and deplorable. The guards were hostile, and severe beatings, torture and humiliation of detainees were the norm. No one appeared to care whether the detainees survived. Zdravko Mucić was sentenced to 9 years imprisonment.

Esad Landžo was also convicted of killings and torture in the camp. One of the several shocking testimonies presented at the conference related to the killing of Šćepo Gotovac, who was between 60 and 70 years at the time. He was beaten to death, and an SDS badge was affixed to his forehead. Esad Landžo, whose testimony before the Court was also portrayed, in fact admitted to participating in the beating. He did try to evade his responsibility by claiming that he was a mere instrument of his superiors. The Trial Chamber rejected such claims and noted that Landžo took perverse pleasure in inflicting pain and suffering. He was sentenced to 15 years in prison.

The fourth accused, Zejnil Delalić, was acquitted by the Tribunal, and the conference audience heard on what kind of evidence the court relied in reaching such a decision.

The conference in Konjic, organized by the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Republika Srpska and ICTY Outreach, followed similar events held earlier this year in Brčko and Foča. As concrete evidence of crimes is presented at these conferences, the suffering of victims and the responsibility of the perpetrators can no longer be ignored and denied.

Dragiša Andrić, President of the Višegrad Association of Camp Detainees, told the press that the event in Konjic represents a good way to dispel the mistrust of potential witnesses that have been avoiding or refusing to appear before the Tribunal. He stressed the importance of processing all those who have in any way been involved in breaches of international humanitarian law, regardless of their national, ethnic or religious affiliation.

Last weekend's event in Konjic is part of the continuing efforts of ICTY Outreach to ensure that the important work of the tribunal is accessible and visible to those whom it concerns the most: the victims and their societies.

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