

Statement of the Prosecutor on the transfer of Ratko Mladić to the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia

Today Ratko Mladić is in the custody of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia. For almost 16 years he has evaded justice. Now he must answer to the serious international crimes he has been charged with.

We thank the authorities of the Netherlands for their excellent work in facilitating the transfer. On Friday 3 June at 10:00 a.m., Ratko Mladić will make his initial appearance before the Tribunal.

Ratko Mladić's transfer into the Tribunal's custody is significant on many levels.

For this Tribunal, the transfer brings us closer to the completion of our mandate to hold accountable those most responsible for serious crimes committed during the wars in the former Yugoslavia. As a result of the arrest, today, only one of the 161 persons indicted by the Tribunal remains at large. Of course, the trial of Ratko Mladić is much more than a statistic. Ratko Mladić was the highest-ranking Bosnian Serb military figure during the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. He is charged with responsibility for the role he and his military forces played in the violent criminal campaigns that swept across Bosnia and Herzegovina from 1992 to 1995. His crimes left communities broken and a nation torn apart.

For international justice, Ratko Mladić's transfer to the Tribunal is equally important. His arrest confirms that no one can count on impunity for war crimes.

For the victims of the crimes alleged against Ratko Mladić, the transfer holds the most significance of all. Sixteen years is a long time to wait for justice. It is a long time to know that someone responsible for their trauma is walking free. We understand why the victims have been impatient for this day and we recognize their courage. Without their support and involvement in our cases, this Tribunal could have achieved nothing.

Over the past months, we have been more and more critical of Serbia's unsuccessful efforts

to capture Ratko Mladić. We asked for improvements in the operations carried out on the ground. Today, we are very pleased to acknowledge the Serbian authorities' success in arresting Ratko Mladić. We thank the President, the Serbian National Security Council and the members of the Action Team that has been tracking the fugitives. We also thank the security services, which have worked towards Mladić's arrest. We ask the authorities to continue the operational improvements that led to Mladić's arrest. We want to see the remaining ICTY fugitive – Goran Hadžić – arrested without further delay.

The international community has also played a significant role in bringing about Ratko Mladić's arrest. This arrest is proof that ending impunity requires a united front. We particularly thank the European Union for giving Serbia positive incentives to cooperate with the Tribunal. We also acknowledge civil society, which has insisted on holding Ratko Mladić accountable and provided great support to my Office on this issue.

I must also mention the role played by the staff of this Tribunal. We could say that the people at this Tribunal who have worked hard over sixteen years to bring about this day are just doing their job. But I want to recognize the extent of their loyalty to the Tribunal and their dedication to international justice. Their efforts are especially impressive, given that we are working in the shadow of the Tribunal's completion strategy and the resulting lack of job security for our staff.

Let me turn now to the upcoming trial of Ratko Mladić. Why is it so important for us to prosecute Ratko Mladić? The answer to this question lies in his position of power and influence during the war. It also lies in the nature and extent of the atrocities committed. Ratko Mladić was a Colonel General and Commander of the Main Staff of the Bosnian Serb Army. He was the most powerful military figure in Bosnia during the war. He is charged with crimes that shocked the conscience of the international community. These crimes symbolize the brutality of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Ratko Mladić is charged with genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes arising out of the following events:

- the violent ethnic cleansing campaigns that devastated the Bosnian Muslim and Bosnian Croat communities in large parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina between 1992

and 1995. These campaigns resulted in death and destruction and they displaced entire communities;

- the shelling and sniping campaign that terrorized the civilian population of Sarajevo for more than three years between 1992-1995;
- the killing of over 7,000 Bosnian Muslim men and boys in Srebrenica in 1995; and
- taking United Nations personnel hostages in May and June 1995.

Today, we have filed an amended indictment against Ratko Mladić. We have done this to make sure the charges against Ratko Mladić reflect the most recent developments in the Tribunal's case law. The amended indictment also provides more information about some of the charges brought.

We know that an important responsibility now lies in our hands. I have no doubt that Mladić will receive a fair trial and that his rights will be respected. We will draw on the many lessons we have learned over the years to make the Mladić prosecution successful. Our challenge is to present a manageable case that reasonably reflects Ratko Mladić's alleged criminality and the harms suffered by his victims. We will need resources to complete the work that now lies ahead. The continued support of the international community will remain critical to our success.

In conclusion, the full significance of Ratko Mladić's transfer to The Hague is difficult to fully express. I hear many people commenting that his arrest ends an important chapter for international criminal justice. But the process of establishing Ratko Mladić's accountability has only just begun. And we must not forget that the victims of many thousands of other crimes committed during the wars are still waiting for justice. Ultimately, the success of this Tribunal will be measured by the success of the national prosecuting authorities in the region of the former Yugoslavia. These authorities are prosecuting the many cases not brought before this Tribunal. Their work also deserves our support and recognition.

International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia