

Blaskic Trial: 'Bloody Chaos' In Central Bosnia

Author: [IWPR](#)

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These were inhabitants of several Croatian villages in the Lasva River Valley who witnessed or experienced indescribable brutalities at the hands of the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina and their allies, the "mujahedeen." A female witness described how her husband was impaled and sawn in two; another witness was a mother whose three sons were murdered; a girl child described how her mother was murdered and father and brother heavily wounded.

A peasant described his escape from the execution grounds where the "mujahedeen" shot 30 Croats whose bodies have not yet been found. The Trial Chamber heard horrendous stories and saw appalling video recordings of decapitations, hearts removed from the body and brains spilt on the ground as well as mass funerals...

By insisting on the drastic details, the Defence - in the words of Blaskic's Defence counsel, Anto Nobile - is not trying to defend or justify the crimes committed by Croatian Defence Council (HVO) forces under the command of the accused. The Defence intends, Nobile said, to show that one act of violence gave rise to another; to demonstrate the conditions in which Blaskic worked and to explain his inability to end the spiral of violence.

The horrific crimes described by the last week's batch of witnesses took place in the middle and the second half of 1993 that is after the April offensive of HVO against Ahmici and other Muslim villages in the Lasva River Valley.

The Defence, however, points out that in that part of Bosnia "first blood" was spilt by the Muslims and their "partners in crime", the mujahedeen, in the Croatian village of Dusina in January 1993 (see Update 102). It was the Bosnian Muslims, the Defence contends, who were therefore responsible for initiating the "spiral of violence" that soon went out of control.

Moreover, in a comment made on a video of a mass funeral of murdered Croats in Vitez, one of the last week's witnesses said that the bereaved women and mothers had been embittered and had sworn loudly at Blaskic and Cerkez (who was a commander of HVO brigade in Vitez and a co-accused for crimes in the Lasva Valley) for "protecting Muslims while our people [the Croats] are dying."

Blaskic and Cerkez allegedly refused to attack Old (Stari) Vitez, the part of the town that was under Muslim control, "from where snipers were killing several Croats every day." She added that Blaskic and Cerkez had on one occasion refused artillery support to Darko Kraljevic and his "Knights," an HVO paramilitary formation, which had lost more than 20 men in its bungled attack on Old Vitez.

In response to Nobile's question as to why Blaskic did not allow the shelling of Old Vitez, the witness replied: "So as not to cause civilian casualties - he protected them while our people were dying." The witness added that her fellow Croat women from Vitez "shall never forgive him for that."

It remains unclear why - if she can not forgive him - she nevertheless came to The Hague as a defence witness, as well as why Blaskic - if he was indeed the "protector of Muslims" - said that Croats of Central Bosnia still revered him as their greatest hero.

Location: [Bosnia and](#)

Herzegovina

Focus: International Criminal Tribunal for the former
Yugoslavia

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