

Bosnia: 'Cash for Crimes' Scheme Slammed

Author: [Gordana Katana](#)

Republika Srpska's offer of money and plane tickets to entice fugitive Hague tribunal indictees to give themselves up is roundly condemned.

The Bosnian Serb leadership's latest attempts to convince war crimes suspects to give themselves up have so far met with failure and ridicule.

Republika Srpska, RS, hopes to improve its poor record of cooperation with the Hague tribunal by offering financial incentives to fugitives who surrender voluntarily.

Indicted suspects can collect a lifelong stipend of 200 euro a month, and their families are entitled to free tickets to the Netherlands three times a year to visit them as well as 250 euro every two months for other expenses.

But not only has the scheme failed to tempt even one indictee, it has been ridiculed by legal experts, politicians and the general public alike.

Independent political analyst Tanja Topic dismissed the move as "ridiculous", telling IWPR, "Now you have a situation in Serbia, Croatia and here in Bosnia-Herzegovina where you are rewarding certain people for genocide and murder.

"Instead of firmly disavowing such a policy, these politicians actually prove time and again that they have not abandoned the ideas leading to ethnical cleansing and genocide.

"[The RS authorities] are only paying lip service to the tribunal. Time is passing and the government is not making any real effort to arrest war crimes suspects."

Miodrag Zivanovic, a professor at the Banja Luka University School of Philosophy, went even further, claiming that "in moral terms, financial assistance to someone who has committed war crimes is untenable".

And Senad Sacirbegovic, a Muslim returnee to Banja Luka who had been expelled from the city during the war, described the offer as "a disgrace", adding that it would not make any of the non-Serb refugees feel comfortable upon their return to RS.

The most-wanted fugitives such as Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic and his army commander General Ratko Mladic - who have been on the run for eight years - will certainly not turn themselves in for 200 euro a month, Topic said.

She added that the Bosnian Serb entity would face another dilemma if any suspect were ever to take advantage of the offer, "We are on the verge of bankruptcy so we have to ask the inevitable question - where would the RS government find the money for this?"

RS leaders have rejected cooperation with The Hague mostly over fears that the tribunal could directly or indirectly blame them for three and a half years of bloodshed.

Bosnian Serb obstructionism has frustrated the international community and led to the threat of political or financial sanctions.

Tribunal chief prosecutor Carla Del Ponte's recent trip to Banja Luka on July 18 appears to have prompted RS president Dragan Cavic, parliamentary speaker Dragan Kalinic and premier Dragan Mikerevic to offer the fugitive deal.

However, members of the RS public believe that the government's decision will hardly encourage the 14 indictees still at large to surrender voluntarily.

At the same time, some politicians, public officials and some citizens view the package as "immoral", and believe it is designed to keep the ruling coalition of the Serbian Democratic Party, SDS, and the Party of the Democratic Progress, PDP, in power.

As many Bosnian Serbs still see war crimes suspects as heroes, if the government took any concrete steps towards their arrest, it could easily lead to their political downfall at the next elections.

Marko Pavic, vice president of the Democratic People's Party, said, "Under pressure from the international community, this government has reluctantly passed a law on cooperation with the tribunal [but] is unwilling to effectively implement it.

"This offer of financial assistance in case of voluntary surrender is a mere publicity stunt for [the benefit of] Carla Del Ponte - and certainly not a step forward intended to help change the mindset of those accused of war crimes."

Gordana Katana is a correspondent with Voice Of America in Banja Luka

Location: Serbia
Croatia
Bosnia and
Herzegovina

Focus: Balkans: Regional Reporting & Sustainable
Training

Source URL: <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/bosnia-cash-crimes-scheme-slammed>