

## **Bosniak Woman Recalls Finding Remains of Son**

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She describes moment when she managed to identify her child in exhumed mass grave.

The trial of former Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic continued this week with a moving testimony of a woman whose husband and son were killed in the eastern Bosnian village of Novoseoci in autumn 1992.

Novoseoci is a village in the Sokolac municipality, one of 21 listed in the indictment against Karadzic.

According to the indictment, former Republika Srpska, RS, president Karadzic "planned, instigated, ordered and/or aided and abetted persecutions on political and religious grounds against Bosnian Muslims and Croats" living in almost two dozen Bosnian municipalities, including Sokolac, near Sarajevo.

The accused is also charged with planning and overseeing some of the gravest crimes in Bosnia, including the 44-month siege of Sarajevo, as well as the killing of some 8,000 Bosnian Muslim boys and men in the eastern Bosnian town of Srebrenica, in July 1995.

Hague tribunal prosecutors have only recently finished presenting evidence relating to the siege of Sarajevo and currently the court is hearing testimony relating to crimes committed in Bosnian municipalities

Munira Selmanovic, a Bosnian Muslim, or Bosniak, from Novoseoci, this week described to judges the fate of her husband and son killed in the autumn of 1992.

At the beginning of the proceedings, prosecutor Hildegard Uertz-Retzlaff read a resume of Selmanovic's statement, in which the witness said that Serb forces attacked Novoseoci on September 22. According to the witness' statement, "all residents of the village were then ordered to gather on a meadow."

At the same time, the statement went on, Serb forces started pillaging Bosniak homes, despite having promised them beforehand that their freedom would be respected and they would be allowed to remain in the village.

According to the witness, at that time Serb forces were commanded by Momcilo Pajic.

Selmanovic said that the while the men were forced to stay back and "help the Serb forces with work", women, children and elderly men were led in a line, commanded by Pajic, towards buses which would take them to the territory held by Bosnian government forces.

"One woman was killed because she was going too fast while she was walking to the bus," the witness added.

According to Selmanovic, 44 Bosniak men were later killed, and many of their bodies were exhumed from one mass grave located in the Rogatica municipality.

It was only in the autumn of 2000 that this mass grave was exhumed. Before that, this site had been used as a garbage dump.

"It was there that I found my child," the witness said, fighting tears. "There were four bodies in that hole. I recognised him by his necklace, by the sweater, by the shoes. And by his bones.

"The front side of the sweater he was wearing was untouched, as if the bullet hadn't gone through when he was killed. But when they turned him over, bullets fell out of his remains."

During the cross-examination of the witness, Karadzic, who represents himself in court, asked Selmanovic whether Bosniaks had asked for the evacuation themselves, for fear of Serb paramilitaries. The witness denied this.

Selmanovic also denied that the intervention of Serb forces in the village was caused by the villagers' refusal to hand over their weapons to the Serbs.

Karadzic then asked the witness about the bullets that fell out of her son's remains when he was found in a mass grave. Selmanovic answered that she "had counted seven".

Judge Morrison warned the accused that such detailed questions were pointless.

Karadzic then put it to the witness that she couldn't be quite sure of the time and circumstances of the

death of the Bosniak men from Novoseoci, to which Selmanovic agreed.

But she stood by her claims that "Momcilo Pajic was the one responsible for their deaths".

At the end of the cross examination, Karadzic said he had "compassion for and solidarity with the witness", and pointed out that he had "never heard of this village before", at least not until he read the indictment against him.

The trial continues next week.

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