

## **Bosnian Court Judgement in Rape Case**

**Author:** [Denis Dzidic](#)

Former Bosnian Serb soldier is sentenced to 16 years in prison for raping Muslim women during the war. Bosnia's war crimes court sentenced this week Radovan Stankovic, former member of a Serb paramilitary unit, to 16 years in prison for rape and other crimes against humanity committed in the eastern Bosnian town of Foca in 1992.

This is the first verdict to be handed down in a case transferred from the Hague tribunal to Sarajevo. Stankovic was initially indicted in 1996, together with seven other accused – Dragan Zelenovic, Dragoljub Kunarac, Radomir Kovac, Zoran Vukovic, Gojko Jankovic, Dragan Gagovic and Janko Janjic - for crimes committed in Foca.

Kunarac, Kovac and Vukovic were convicted in February 2001, sentenced to 28, 20 and 12 years in prison respectively. Two others, Gagovic and Janjic, died during NATO troops' attempts to arrest them, in 1999 and 2000.

Zelenovic was arrested in Russia last August, and was extradited to The Hague in June this year. The prosecutors have requested that his case be transferred to the Bosnian court, as part of plans to wind down the Hague tribunal's work over the next few years.

Jankovic's case has also been transferred to Sarajevo and his trial is currently in the defense phase.

Stanković was arrested by NATO troops in Bosnia on July 9, 2002, after which he was sent to the Hague tribunal. This court decided to refer his case to Bosnia in September 2002, but that happened only last year.

Stankovic's trial began in February this year.

Charges against him included detaining Muslim women and turning them into sex slaves for fellow soldiers. Women were detained and subjected to forced labour, beating and rape, his indictment says.

In 1992, Stankovic is accused of setting up a detention centre for women in Foca called "Karaman's house", where nine Bosnian Muslim girls aged from 12 to 24 were detained. Stankovic and others are alleged to have treated the girls as their property, and during the entire period of their detention - from April until October 1992 - they were subjected to repeated rapes and sexual assaults.

Explaining their verdict handed out on November 14, the judges said that "soldiers referred to this house as the Brothel".

They also said the trial chamber heard enough evidence supporting claims that Stankovic held one of the imprisoned women for himself, and treated her as his sex slave, raping her almost every night.

On one occasion, the judges added, the accused even raped the girl's young sister in front of her.

His entire trial was held behind closed doors, except for two hearings and the closing arguments. The judges justified this decision by the need to protect the identity and dignity of the witnesses. Many of them were women raped in Karaman's house.

Among those present at the sentencing hearing was the president of the association Women Victims of War, Bakira Hasecic.

"I'm very disappointed with the verdict, it should have been much more severe," she said, adding that "it seems it is better to be a war criminal in this country, than a victim."

Stankovic's defense lawyers said they would appeal the judgement.

Denis Dzidic is an IWPR reporter in Sarajevo.

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