

Comment: Justice to a Timetable

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What the United Nations needs to do to let the Hague tribunal finish its job.

Tribunal president Theodor Meron set out the key dilemma facing the United Nations in this week's annual report. Either his court remains open past the 2008 deadline for its closure, or the UN takes tough action to bring in 17 missing suspects.

Meron's problem is simple - the UN, under American pressure, wants to wind up the tribunal by 2008, ending the 15 years of work by this historic body.

But the deadline cannot be met unless the missing suspects turn up for trial. And right now, they are running free.

Croatia has yet to hand over key suspect Ante Gotovina, one of several generals accused of war crimes against Serbs in the 1991-95 war.

Meanwhile, Serbia is holding onto half a dozen suspects, most notably the man wanted for the Srebrenica massacre, General Ratko Mladic.

And then there is Dr Radovan Karadzic, the former Bosnian Serb president, believed to be wandering the hills between safe houses in Bosnia and Montenegro.

Belgrade and Zagreb insist that these men have vanished. Prosecutors and many international diplomats think differently.

The court is powerless to force governments to hand over such men. Only the UN can do that - and then only if it grasps the nettle and threatens sanctions.

There are a range of measures the UN can take, from cutting aid to calling on the International Monetary Fund to freeze disbursements of cash, or even suspending UN membership.

But all these measures will be controversial. Sanctions will hurt not just the governments, but the ordinary citizens of Croatia and Serbia, who are now just starting to rebuild their lives.

It is a dilemma, but it is one that only the UN can solve. The court can hold trials, but it cannot, on its own, compel states to hand over the suspects.

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Location: [Serbia](#)
[Croatia](#)
[Bosnia and](#)
[Herzegovina](#)

