

## **COURTSIDE: Bosanski Samac Trial**

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Bosnian Croat witness speaks of daily beatings by Serb jailers

A prosecution witness last week told the court of the brutal beatings he endured in Serb-held camps throughout Bosnia, as well as in a prison in neighbouring Serbia.

The protected witness, a Bosnian Croat farmer before the war in Bosanski Samac, recalled the role played by broadcast propaganda in the growth of ethnic tension in the area. In April 1992, he heard the accused Blagoje Simic claiming Samac as Serbian territory and demand all local Croats leave voluntarily.

Simic is on trial for the persecution of non-Serbs in Bosanski Samac, together with Miroslav Tadic and Simo Zaric, all of whom held key positions there at the time. Their two co-accused, Milan Simic and Stevan Todorovic, have both pleaded guilty.

The witness said that after Simic's broadcast "people panicked" and began leaving en masse. He evacuated his family but stayed behind, thinking he had no reason to fear.

After Serb forces took control on April 17, 1992 non-Serbs were ordered to put a white stripe on their cars if they wanted to drive around, the witness said.

They also had to wear a white armband when out walking and were forbidden from gathering in public in groups of more than two. From then on, people were no longer allowed to leave the area without permission of the local Serb authorities.

On May 2, the witness was arrested and taken to the territorial defence headquarters, where he and other captives were beaten daily. He was interrogated about the number of Serbs he had killed and Serb women he had raped. The witness said he was forced to sign a statement about this, and said he never saw any of the accused on the premises.

When the International Red Cross visited the non-Serb detainees there, the guards warned them to watch their words, as a result of which they did not speak freely.

After, they were moved to a warehouse in Crkvine, where the Croat detainees were brutally beaten one night by three soldiers and one inmate was killed. On their return to the territorial defence building, one of the soldiers told them they should be grateful to him for sparing their lives.

The witness then ended up in Batajnica military compound, in Serbia, where he was allegedly put on trial by an army major. The defence noted that in his original statement to tribunal investigators, the witness said this "judge" had asked him if he had been beaten in Bosnia, and the witness replied that he had not. The witness now says he was never asked about these beatings.

He was then jailed in Serbia, where he claims the prison guards stubbed out cigarettes on his neck and shoulders. After being exchanged in August 1992, the witness was hospitalised in Zagreb for three months. He was then mobilised in the Bosnian Croat HVO and sent to the front line in Bosnia.

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**Location:** Serbia  
Bosnia and  
Herzegovina

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