

## **Courtside: Oric Makes First Appearance**

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By Chris Stephen in The Hague (TU 308, 7-11 April 2003)

The case is likely to be one of the most hotly contested ever held at The Hague: A demonstration was held by Bosnian war veterans outside the court last Saturday and a bigger one is planned, with Bosnians coming from all over Europe, on April 26.

These protestors insist Oric should be regarded as a hero for defending Srebrenica against the ethnic cleansing that swept through Bosnia in the summer of 1992.

"If he is guilty, then so am I - so are we all," said one of the demonstrators on Saturday.

But Hague prosecutors think differently. The indictment for violations of the laws or customs of war charges Oric with responsibility for the death of seven Serb prisoners.

Oric is not charged with crimes personally, but is being held responsible because he was the commander of the units which carried them out.

He is accused of responsibility for the deaths of Dragutin Kukic, Jakov Dokic, Dragan Ilic, Milisav Milovanovic, Kostadin Popovic, Branko Sekulic and Bogdan Zivanovic.

The indictment says Oric's troops beat Kukic to death on or about September 25 1992, and that the others were killed, while in custody of forces under Oric's control, between February 6 and March 20 1993.

Oric is also charged with cruel treatment including supervising beatings of Serb prisoners held in Srebrenica. The indictment claims that one Serb prisoner had his teeth removed with rusty pliers, after which a Bosnian soldier urinated into his mouth.

He is further accused of destroying buildings and stealing property from 15 Serb-held villages during a campaign in which units under his command went out to raid behind the lines.

Oric, who was charged under a sealed indictment, was arrested by NATO-led SFOR troops earlier this month in the north-eastern Bosnian town of Tuzla.

The long-haired 36-year-old defendant appeared in court wearing a blue open-necked shirt and a dark jacket, and was flanked by two UN security officers.

He said little during the short hearing, only confirming his name, and pleading not guilty to all charges. Asked if he had anything to add, he said, "Your honours, sirs, I don't have anything to say."

The court ordered that he be kept in custody until a trial can begin.

Chris Stephen is IWPR's project manager in The Hague.

**Location:** Bosnia and  
Herzegovina

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