

## **Croatian Serb Leader Claims Trial Unfair**

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Milan Martić suggests Hague prosecutors favour Croats over Serbs.

Croatian Serb rebel leader Milan Martić this week told his appeal hearing at the Hague tribunal that he had not been given a fair trial.

Last year, the tribunal sentenced Martić to 35 years in prison for crimes committed during the early Nineties against Croats and other non-Serbs in Croatia.

"I expected a fair trial, but apparently I was very wrong," Martić told the appeals chamber on June 26.

The trial judges, he claimed, seemed to draw inspiration from Dante's *Divine Comedy*, where the gates of Hell bear the inscription, "Abandon all hope, ye who enter here."

Martić, who was variously president, interior minister and defence minister of the rebel Serb-held Krajina region in Croatia, was convicted on 16 counts including murder, torture, deportation, attacks on civilians and the wanton destruction of civilian areas.

Judges found that he had taken part in a "joint criminal enterprise", along with the late Serbian president Slobodan Milošević, which aimed to create a unified Serbian state through a campaign of violence against non-Serbs in parts of Croatia and Bosnia.

The initial indictment was issued in July 1995. Martić surrendered to the tribunal in May 2002, after seven years on the run.

This week, Martić also criticised the fact that prosecutors in the trial of the Croatian generals who commanded Operation Storm, the offensive that ended Serb control in Krajina, are not questioning the legality of that operation.

Operation Storm brought an end to Krajina's self-declared autonomy, established after the collapse of the former Yugoslavia. Krajina covered roughly a quarter of Croatia's territory.

"It was terrible, after everything that happened, to hear the prosecution and the defence agree that Operation Storm was a legitimate operation," said Martić.

"That was classic aggression," he said, adding that all Croatian operations bore the traits of genocide. "But neither the tribunal nor the prosecutors were interested in that, and a fascist state was created in the heart of Europe."

Three generals, Ante Gotovina, Mladen Markac and Ivan Cermak, are on trial for crimes committed by troops during and after the offensive. Their lawyers have said that the findings against Martić would help

their clients' defence.

During his trial, Martić often complained of unequal treatment, asking why prosecutors charged him with war crimes while certain Croatian politicians went free.

The Appeals Chamber will hand down Martić's final sentence at a later date.

Goran Jungvirth is an IWPR-trained journalist in Zagreb.

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