

## **Croats Beaten Daily in North Serbia Jail - Witness**

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Testimony relates to Serb military actions in eastern Croatia in 1991.

A protected witness in the trial of Croatian Serb political leader Goran Hadzic this week described how he was detained and severely beaten in Serbia.

The prosecution witness, referred to only as GH-071, testified at the Hague tribunal with face and voice distortion.

He said he was arrested for being part of a "civilian defence unit" in his native village of Suhopolje in Croatia, although at the time he was living in the city of Novi Sad in neighbouring Serbia.

After his arrest, the witness said he was sent to a detention centre called Begejci in northern Serbia. The witness described it as "a typical Serbian village barn", which was quite large but "still felt crammed with more than 300 prisoners inside".

"As [the Croatian city of] Vukovar fell to Serb forces [in November 1991], the number increased very soon," he said. "Some 200 more people came and were brought into the same barn. It was impossible to speak about humane conditions in the room."

The witness said he did not know any of the other prisoners when he arrived, but they ended up talking to one another during the month they spent in the barn.

"Most of them were from Eastern Slavonia - from Croatia - that's where their houses and families were," GH-071 said.

Apart from the Croats, there were also some Serbs who he said had arrested for "avoiding military service, apparently", and even "some students from Sri Lanka".

Immediately after arriving at the facility, the witness was beaten, questioned, and threatened with further assault.

"The men there... they looked like criminals to me, like recently-released prisoners who suddenly joined the reserve forces," he said, adding that he could tell from their uniforms that they belonged to the military police of the Yugoslav People's Army, or JNA.

GH-071 said "beatings and questionings" took place on a daily basis, and that he saw one prisoner beaten to death.

"I was happy it did not happen to me," he added.

During the war in Croatia in the early 1990s, defendant Hadzic held senior political positions in the Serb-held parts of that country. He was head of the government in the self-declared Serbian Autonomous District of Slavonia, Baranja and Western Srem, known as SAO SBWS; and was president of the so-called Republic of the Serbian Krajina - which absorbed SAO SBWS territory - from February 1992 to December 1993.

Hadzic is alleged to have been part of a "joint criminal enterprise" with other political and military officials, whose purpose was the "permanent forcible removal of a majority of the Croat and other non-Serb population from approximately one-third of the territory of the Republic of Croatia" in order to create a Serb-dominated state.

He is charged with 14 counts of war crimes and crimes against humanity committed against the Croat and non-Serb population, including persecutions, extermination, murder, imprisonment, torture, inhumane acts, cruel treatment, deportation, wanton destruction and plunder.

In a brief cross-examination, Hadzic's lawyer, Zoran Zivanovic, asked the witness who was in charge of the facility, to which the witness replied that he believed it was "a major of the JNA called Miroslav Zivanovic".

When the defence asked whether any prisoners complained about the conditions in which they were held, GH-071 replied that "there was no way of doing that, and even if there were a way, there would be no purpose".

The other witness who appeared this week is Petr Kypr, a Czech diplomat who was a member of the European Community Monitoring Mission, ECMM, in Croatia during the conflict.

Kypr, who witnessed the evacuation of many localities in Eastern Slavonia, said that there was an obvious "joint attempt by the JNA and local Serb paramilitaries to expel as much as possible of the Croatian population".

Kypr's team of observers wanted to visit the Vukovar hospital, where a large number of Croats were being held by the JNA after the town's capture in November 1991. However, they were prevented from doing so due by what JNA officers apparently referred to as "security reasons".

"We were told that most people held at Vukovar hospital would be evacuated – most, but not all. We were promised that the remainder will be kept for exchange later," Kypr said.

Instead, on November 20, 1991, some 200 prisoners were transported from the hospital to the nearby Ovcara farm and killed.

Hadzic's defence asked Ambassador Kypr whether he had any contact with Hadzic's civilian authorities during this time.

"No, in fact our contact was with the JNA, although there were some Serb representatives not wearing uniforms at one meeting; possibly they were representatives of the civilian authorities," Kypr replied.

The defence lawyer concluded from this that it was the JNA who was responsible for the situation, not Hadzic's civilian authorities.

Hadzic was arrested in Serbia in July 2011 after seven years on the run and was the last remaining suspect wanted by the Hague tribunal.

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**Location:** [Serbia](#)  
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