

Dutchbat Vets to Testify for Karadzic Defence

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Defence lawyer says testimony of Dutch soldiers will help prove his client's innocence.

A group of Dutch veterans from a unit deployed in Srebrenica in July 1995 will testify for the defence in the trial of former Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic, according to his lawyer.

"I am convinced that more than 20 Dutch soldiers and officers will testify in the Karadzic case at the [Hague] Tribunal," lawyer Svetozar Vujacic told IWPR, adding that around 20 of the ex-soldiers had approached him offering to give evidence.

"The testimonies of these soldiers will help not only Karadzic, but the Serbian people as well," he said.

However, the Dutch Veterans' Institute could not confirm that ex-soldiers were going to testify in the trial.

Karadzic, the former president of Bosnian Serb entity Republika Srpska, is charged with war crimes committed in Bosnia and Hercegovina during the 1992-95 war. He is indicted for genocide in relation to the Srebrenica massacre, in which some 8,000 Bosniaks were killed.

In the summer of 1995, nearly 400 Dutch troops were stationed in the area as part of the United Nations Protection Force, UNPROFOR, and their primary duty was to protect civilians in the Srebrenica enclave.

The Dutch battalion – known as Dutchbat – has been criticised for offering little or no resistance to the Bosnian Serb takeover of the UN-designated "safe area" on July 11 1995, which was followed by the worst massacre on European soil since the Second World War.

Observers believe that during the trial, Karadzic's defence will try to shift the blame for the Srebrenica killings onto his wartime defence chief General Ratko Mladic, by offering evidence that the general decided to execute thousands of Bosniaks without Karadzic's approval.

Mladic, who is still on the run, has also been indicted with genocide in Srebrenica.

Karadzic's lawyer says the testimony of the Dutch veterans will help establish the truth about Srebrenica and provide evidence that Karadzic was not responsible for the massacre – which both the Hague tribunal and the International Court of Justice have found to be genocide.

"People will be shocked when they find out what really happened in Srebrenica," said Vujacic.

Milivoje Ivanisevic, head of the Research Centre for Crimes against Bosnian Serbs, also said that 15 to 20 former soldiers from Dutchbat were prepared to give evidence as defence witnesses in the Karadzic trial.

Ivanisevic indicated that the soldiers would testify that they did not see the massacre or any abuse of Bosniaks by Serb troops. He also said they would make it clear they did not foresee the massacre from all that they observed on the ground. This might lend support to a possible defence argument that the massacre was unplanned.

Wiebe Arts, a historian at the Dutch Veterans' Institute, said that while he had heard rumours that a number of Dutch soldiers might testify in the Karadzic case, he could not confirm this was the case.

“Neither I nor the association of Dutchbat veterans know who these [witnesses] are and whether Mr Ivanisevic is telling the truth,” he told IWPR. “I think we will all have to wait for the trial to start to find out whether this will happen.”

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Location: Bosnia and Herzegovina

Topic: Briefly Noted

Focus: International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia

Source URL: <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/dutchbat-vets-testify-karadzic-defence>