

French Troops Seize Kovac

Author: IWPR

French troops in Bosnia arrested Radomir Kovac, one of the eight members of army, police and paramilitary formations of Bosnian Serbs accused in the Foca indictment.

Finally, the French have struck lucky. After the first failed attempt to make an arrest in their sector, on 9 January this year, which resulted in the death of suspect Dragan Gagovic (See Tribunal Update 107), the French commandos, in co-operation with the German members of SFOR, last week arrested Radomir Kovac.

He was seized without problems or resistance in the middle of the night at his Foca flat where he lived quietly - and carelessly- with his family, despite the fact that he was accused in June 1996 of raping and enslaving Bosnian Muslim women in the same town in Eastern Bosnia. It remains unclear why it has taken a full three years to arrest him.

Prosecutor Louise Arbour had in the past accused the French of having turned their sector into a "safe haven" for war crimes suspects. Last week however, she hailed the arrest and commended "the professionalism and commitment of all those involved."

Arbour commended the fact that it was the third arrest in the past seven weeks - Dragan Kolundzija and Radoslav Brdjanin being arrested earlier in the British sector (See Tribunal Updates 129 and 133). With these latest arrests, the Prosecutor last week noted, " SFOR sent a clear signal to all remaining indictees that the failure of the relevant local authorities to arrest them and transfer them to The Hague will not disrupt the course of justice."

In his first public appearance in The Hague, Kovac last week pleaded "not guilty" to both counts of the indictment which charge him with enslaving and raping Muslim women and committing a crime against humanity.

Of the some 40 accused who have so far gone through the initial appearance procedure, only one, Drazen Erdemovic - pleaded guilty at this stage. Goran Jelusic subsequently admitted his own guilt - but only several months after pleading "not guilty" on all of the many counts of the "Brcko indictment".

Radomir Kovac, called "Klanfa", is one of the eight members of army, police and paramilitary formations of Bosnian Serbs, who are accused by the so-called "Foca indictment" of June 1996, of enslaving, raping and torturing Muslim women in Foca, after having seized the town in April 1992.

Of the eight, Dragoljub Kunarac is already in detention, and Judge Lan Chand Vohrah recently ordered the Prosecution to withdraw charges against the late Dragan Gagovic (WHO DIED WHERE? & WHEN?).

At the request of his temporary Defence counsel, British lawyer Howard Morrison, only a general part of the "Foca Indictment", as well as Counts 61 and 62 referring to this accused, were read during Kovac's initial appearance. They allege that Kovac - from October 1992 until before the end of February 1993 - kept in "sexual captivity" four Muslim girls and women, one of whom one was only 15 years old.

Besides being forced to do household chores, these women - the indictment says - were subjected to constant individual or group rapes and various forms of sexual abuse, only to be eventually sold by the accused as "slaves": one for 200 and two others for 500 German Marks each.

After the accused pleaded not guilty, Judge Florence Mumba asked the Prosecution to submit the material evidence to Kovac's defenders as soon as possible, in order to be able to prepare for the trial that should start in four or five months time, since his co-accused, Kunarac, has already been in detention for a year and a half.

Morrison, however, announced that the Defence will most likely request the separation of the cases since Kovac is accused in "only two" counts, while Kunarac is accused in four.

In the press conference, held several hours earlier, Deputy Prosecutor Graham Blewitt expressed hope that some of the other accused by the "Foca Indictment" would be arrested soon, so that the Tribunal would not have to stage seven separate trials because of their "irregular" arrival to The Hague.

Location: Bosnia and Herzegovina

Focus: International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia

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