

International Community Smuggled Arms, Claims Karadzic

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Former Bosnian Serb leader demands documents he says will prove UN members funneled weapons to Bosnian army.

Former Bosnian Serb president Radovan Karadzic this week demanded that several countries turn over documents which he claims will prove they were illegally smuggling weapons into Bosnia during the war.

“[The documents] will show not only what was happening on the ground...[but also] that members of the UN were on the side of the warring party, rather than neutral parties,” Karadzic said at a February 15 hearing in the Hague tribunal, which included representatives from Germany, France, Croatia and Iran. Bosnian representatives were unable to attend due to “technical obstacles”.

A 1991 United Nations arms embargo prevented countries from supplying weapons to armies in the former Yugoslavia, but Karadzic claims that many funneled weapons to the Bosnian army, composed mostly of Bosniaks.

In the past several months, he has requested related documents from several countries which he says are pertinent to his defence. The hearing this week was held to discuss states’ progress in locating the documents, or in Germany’s case, why they do not wish to hand them over.

“We can’t arrive at a full picture and have a fair trial if we do not have all the elements,” Karadzic told the court this week.

German ambassador Thomas Laufer disagreed, questioning the relevance of the requested documents.

“Karadzic is facing charges of genocide and other crimes, and it not clear why [these documents] are required,” Laufer said. “We stick to our position.”

Karadzic responded that “the events in Bosnia are not part of a vacuum”.

“The smuggling of weapons that arrived through Germany ...that is of significance and will impact on the testimonies on international witnesses,” he continued.

He added that several countries, Germany included, “predicted what would happen in Yugoslavia and some of them contributed actively to what would happen there”.

In a more detailed written request to the German government dated August 12, 2009, Karadzic stated that many of the documents were directly related to the July 1995 Srebrenica massacre, in which about 8,000 Bosniak men and boys were killed. It is considered the single worst atrocity to occur on European soil since World War II.

Karadzic, the president of Bosnia's Republika Srpska from 1992 to 1996, is accused of planning the Srebrenica massacre as well as with overseeing the siege of Sarajevo that left nearly 12,000 people dead.

The indictment - which lists 11 counts in total - alleges that he is responsible for crimes of genocide, persecution, extermination, murder and forcible transfer which "contributed to achieving the objective of the permanent removal of Bosnian Muslims and Bosnian Croats from Bosnian Serb-claimed territory".

Karadzic wrote in the August 12 request that intelligence gathered by the German government will show that he never "favoured, planned, or condoned the killing of civilians in Srebrenica".

Furthermore, Karadzic stated that the smuggling of weapons to the Bosnian army will show that there was a "legitimate military objective to commence operations" on Srebrenica, since the smuggled weapons were, he claims, being used to launch attacks on Bosnian Serb civilians.

Laufer was not convinced by Karadzic's assertions, and told judges that the accused "simply claims that certain people had knowledge of certain events".

"No one can possibly check up on this," Laufer continued. "The way Karadzic is explaining himself is not motivating us to [meet] his demands."

Judge Kwon said that the court will determine whether or not the documents are relevant to Karadzic's case and, as part of that process, he asked the prosecution to clarify some issues relating to Srebrenica.

"The prosecution does not dispute that arms were smuggled in and that Muslim attacks continued after [Srebrenica] was declared a safe area," explained prosecutor Alan Tieger.

He added that the prosecution had never taken the position that the Bosnian army was not a legitimate military target.

Karadzic said he appreciated Tieger's words.

"This leads us to the conclusion that the decisions I made in relation to Srebrenica were legitimate," Karadzic said. "However, that charge remains in the indictment."

He added that attacks against Serbs were "very, very violent" and that he has evidence that "[Bosniak] fighters from the enclave returned with chains of Serb ears around their necks".

Judge Kwon interjected and told Karadzic that "it's one thing to have a legitimate cause in waging war, but totally a separate matter on how it is waged".

"I would like to remind you that the purpose of this trial is to judge whether you are guilty of the charges in the indictment," the judge continued. "This is not an opportunity to produce [evidence] of all the events that happened at the time."

Judge Kwon also asked if the requested documents were at all relevant to the charge that Karadzic is responsible for taking more than 200 UN personnel hostage in 1995.

“The taking of hostages, this was done spontaneously and in a panic,” Karadzic responded. “People perceived these armed representatives as biased. [The hostages] did side with one side in the conflict and that is what we are going to show.”

While Germany objected to providing the requested documents, representatives from France said that they could disclose one of the documents sought. Others, however, were actually internal UN documents they did not possess.

Croatian ambassador Josko Paro said that his country had provided 15 documents to the accused, and would need more time as regards further requests.

Iranian representatives said they had completed a search for the requested documents but found none. They also questioned the relevance of such documents for the accused’s case, especially as relates to the events in Srebrenica.

When asked by Judge Kwon to explain this, Karadzic said the documents will “demonstrate that the charges by the prosecution are not as they seem.

“We have to show there is no evidence for this charge [of genocide] in the indictment. The Serbian side was put in a position to defend its very survival.”

The trial is scheduled to recommence on March 1.

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