

Karadzic Trial Witness Sentenced For Contempt

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Judges rule that health concerns were not adequate reason for failing to appear at trial. A prosecution witness who refused to testify against former Bosnian Serb president Radovan Karadzic was found guilty of contempt and sentenced to two months in prison this week. In the February 24 verdict, judges found that Milan Tupajic, wartime head of the Sokolac municipality, failed to respond to two subpoenas issued on September 23 and November 3 last year. Tupajic cited health reasons for not wanting to testify, and raised additional concerns in the February 2012 trial that remain confidential, Judge O-Gon Kwon said while delivering the judgement. "The chamber reviewed the documents the accused submitted in support of his health concerns, but considers that his health concerns do not constitute a just excuse for his failure to comply with the orders as contained in the subpoenas," Judge Kwon said. He noted that the confidential concerns had also been examined, but that the chamber "considers they do not constitute a just excuse" under the rules of the tribunal. "The chamber thus finds that the accused knowingly and willingly interfered with the administration of justice by refusing to comply with the subpoenas," the judge said. As regards the two-month sentence, "the chamber first considered the gravity of the offence and the fact that by refusing to comply with the subpoenas and to testify before the chamber, the accused had deprived the chamber in the Karadzic case of relevant evidence". Prosecutors allege that Karadzic, the president of Bosnia's self-declared Republika Srpska from 1992 to 1996, 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". He is also accused of planning and overseeing the 44-month siege of Sarajevo that left nearly 12,000 people dead, as well as the massacre of some 8,000 men and boys at Srebrenica in July 1995. Karadzic was arrested in Belgrade in July 2008 after 13 years on the run. Witness testimony in his trial got under way in April 2010 and is ongoing. Rachel Irwin is an IWPR reporter in The Hague.

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