

Kordic and Company 'Not Guilty'

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Now a total of 20 are being held: 14 Bosnian Croats (including Drazen Erdemovic, who worked for the Bosnian Serbs), three Bosniaks (Muslims) and three Serbs. They represent slightly over one quarter of the total number (77) so far charged in public indictments.

Chief Prosecutor of the Tribunal Louise Arbour expressed delight at the arrival of the 10, but stressed that her office had not been involved in any negotiations or discussions which led to the surrender. Although a date has not yet been set for their trial, Arbour admitted in talks with the lawyers of six of the accused, that she had indicated that the prosecution would be in a position to proceed to trial within three to five months.

She also stressed that trial dates are dependent on the Court's calendar and will be set by the judges themselves. Presiding Judge Claude Jorda later confirmed this but added that it was premature to talk about beginning the trial, since this was dependent on a number of circumstances, not least the fact that the Tribunal has only one courtroom at its disposal.

On October 8 the 10 accused appeared before Trial Chamber One. They were asked to enter a plea on each of the 63 counts of the indictment against them. According to procedure, if the accused plead guilty, there will be no trial, but a pre-sentencing hearing is scheduled to consider any mitigating and extenuating circumstances. If, however, the accused plead not guilty, the pretrial procedure is initiated. To date only one defendant - Erdemovic - has pleaded guilty at his initial appearance before the judges. On this occasion there were no surprises and all 10 pleaded not guilty.

The 10 appeared before the court in two groups. The first included members of the political and military leadership of the Croats in central Bosnia. They are: Dario Kordic, the former vice-president of the so-called Herceg-Bosna and its army the Croatian Defence Council (HVO); Mario Cerkez, the commander of the HVO brigade stationed in Vitez; Ivan Santic, the mayor of Vitez at the time; and Pero Skopljak, the former chief of police in Vitez.

Together with Tihomir Blaskic whose trial is currently underway, and Zlatko Aleksovski who was extradited five months ago and who is now being tried separately, these four are charged with planning and ordering the HVO attacks on Muslim villages in the Lasva Valley. Muslim homes, businesses, schools and mosques were destroyed, civilians were forced to dig trenches on the frontlines and almost the entire Muslim population of the area was either killed or expelled

. On these grounds, the four have been charged with grave breaches of the Geneva Convention. Kordic, the first named in this group, is also charged with the crimes against humanity for the persecution of Muslims on political, racial and religious grounds.

The second group was made up of six HVO soldiers appearing under the "Kupreskic and others" indictment. They are charged with participating in the Lasva Valley attacks. The six are: brothers Zoran and Mirjan Kupreskic, Vladimir Santic, Drago Josipovic, Marinko Katava and Dragan Papic.

As was the case with all the defendants in the first group, all pleaded not guilty to the charges of destruction beyond military necessity and the killing of villagers.

Location: [Bosnia and Herzegovina](#)

Focus: [International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia](#)

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