

Kosovars Demand Justice

Author: [Valbona Mehmeti](#)

Kosovo Albanians believe The Hague tribunal is dragging its heels over bringing war crimes suspects to justice.

Eighteen months after the end of the Kosovo war, the international war crimes tribunal in The Hague has yet to indict any Serbs who actively committed crimes against the province's Albanian population.

So far indictments have only been issued against those who allegedly ordered atrocities.

"I know the tribunal is eager to convict the so-called 'big fish', but I think, especially in Kosovo's case, people who actually carried out the crimes should not be allowed to evade justice, as most were local citizens, some of them neighbours of the people they persecuted," said Kosovare Kelmendi, of the Fund for Humanitarian Justice, which provided the tribunal with testimonies of crimes committed during the war.

Kelmendi and other activists point out that in Bosnia both those who ordered and perpetrated crimes have been indicted.

To date, only former president Slobodan Milosevic and five senior federal officials - Milan Milutinovic, Nikola Sainovic, Dragoljub Ojdanic and Veljko Stojiljkovic - have been indicted for crimes committed in Kosovo

The court's failure to bring the actual killers to justice has disappointed victims' families and threatens to undermine stability in the province.

Vjosa, an Albanian from Gjakova, said, "People who lost many members of their families are so tired of waiting for justice, there's a danger they may take justice into their own hands."

Critics of the tribunal also complain that it has focussed only on the exhumation of mass graves, but Hague officials point out that this is a vital part of building cases against suspects.

"We understand why people are frustrated," said tribunal investigator Steve Leach. "But we are doing our best to conduct efficient and fair investigations. There will be arrests but we have to be patient."

According to tribunal data, some 4,000 bodies have been exhumed from mass graves to date and local human rights activists say there is already enough evidence to arrest Serb war crimes suspects.

In her high-profile visit to Kosovo last summer, tribunal chief prosecutor Carla Del Ponte said the list of Serb suspects would be extended. She also said some members of the former Kosovo Liberation Army, KLA, would be investigated for alleged crimes. She mentioned they were being linked to five specific cases, but refused to say more.

Following her remarks, former leaders of the now disbanded KLA told the Pristina media that the KLA had committed no war crimes. They said it had merely protected the Albanian population - and that the tribunal was free to conduct an investigation into their activities.

Critics of the tribunal, meanwhile, have expressed concern over the large number of Serb war crimes suspects who've fled local jails.

In one incident last year, twenty-five Serbs accused of war crimes escaped from Mitrovica prison, in the northern Serbian-held part of the divided town.

Human rights activists say the prison escapes strengthen their demands for suspects to be sent for trial in The Hague.

"War crimes suspects should be tried at the international tribunal or alternatively the The Hague should be allowed to conduct trials in Kosovo," said Kelmendi.

There's also anger at the tribunal's failure to charge Serbian officials responsible for the alleged Dubrava prison massacre, where Serb paramilitaries and prisoners are said to have killed at least 200 Albanian inmates.

Dubrava prison was a Serb military base and was targeted by NATO planes. During the alliance's air campaign, 1,000 Albanian prisoners were brought to the jail from prisons in Serbia.

According to official accounts of the Albanian prison deaths, 19 workers and prisoners died from NATO bombs. However, survivors claim approximately 200 Albanian prisoners were murdered by guards, paramilitaries and Serb inmates.

Human rights activists say Serbia's former justice minister, Dragoljub Jankovic, who was responsible for prisons, should be held responsible for the alleged massacre.

Despite the criticism leveled against it, Leach insists the tribunal is making good progress in Kosovo. "The investigations are being conducted professionally," he said. "Of course we want to arrest suspects but it's crucial that we have strong evidence."

Few in Kosovo question the commitment of the tribunal to bringing war criminals to justice, they are simply frustrated at the pace of the judicial process.

Valbona Mehmeti is a journalist with the Albanian daily Koha Ditore.

Location: [Serbia](#)
[Kosovo](#)
[Bosnia and](#)
[Herzegovina](#)

Source URL: <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/kosovars-demand-justice>