

## **Mladic Trial Slated to Start in March**

**Author:** [Rachel Irwin](#)

Defence for wartime commander asks for more time to prepare case.

The trial of wartime Bosnian Serb army commander Ratko Mladic has been tentatively scheduled to start at the end of March, judges at the Hague tribunal announced this week during a status conference.

The bench, presided over by Judge Alphons Orie, also took note of the medical reports it had ordered on 69-year-old Mladic – whose health has been the subject of intense speculation – but said that “the chamber sees no need to order any further medical exams or to take any other steps in this regard”.

Mladic, who came into the courtroom wearing a grey suit and what looked like a fur-lined hunting hat, appeared thin and at times disoriented. Judge Orie had to repeatedly instruct him to remove the hat, and the accused spoke aloud to his lawyer, Branko Lukic, even when told to whisper so that the entire courtroom would not hear his comments.

The accused also seemed confused when Judge Orie asked him to plead to a crime that was recently added to the indictment – the execution of more than 30 Bosniak men in the village of Bisina in the Sekovici municipality on July 23, 1995.

“I’m not clear on what Bisina means as a term,” Mladic said. “Is that a mountain, a river, or is it a moveable [object] such as a bus, truck, plane, or helicopter? What is Bisina? Is that some kind of place, a village?”

Judge Orie explained that it was a location in the Sekovici municipality where Bosniak men had been murdered.

“Thank you for this explanation,” Mladic said. “I am not guilty and I have nothing whatsoever to do with it.”

Most of the status conference was spent dealing with procedural matters, but when Judge Orie announced that opening statements would begin on March 27, Mladic’s defence lawyer immediately objected.

“We will not be ready to start trial in March 2012, your honour,” Lukic said. “It’s not possible.”

“These are the plans. They have not been carved in stone, but as I said before, the chamber expects that the parties should work towards these dates,” Judge Orie replied.

At the end of the hearing, Mladic told judges that “war was not my wish or the wish of my state... for the sake of truth and justice, I never want to hear the word ‘war’ again, let alone see it repeated”.

Mladic was arrested in Serbia on May 26 after 16 years as a fugitive and made his first appearance in The Hague on June 3. At a July 4 hearing, he was ejected of the courtroom for interrupting judges and refusing to listen to the charges against him.

He was the commander of the Bosnian Serb army from 1992 to 1996, and is alleged to have been responsible for some of the worst atrocities of the Bosnian war. These include the 1995 Srebrenica massacre, which resulted in the murder of some 8,000 Bosniak men and boys, as well as the shelling and sniping campaign against Sarajevo, which killed about 12,000 civilians.

He is also charged with crimes of genocide, persecution, extermination, murder and forcible transfer. The indictment against him was recently reduced at the judges’ request, and it now deals with a total of 106 crimes instead of 196, and the number of Bosnian municipalities involved has been cut from 23 to 15. (See [Judges Agree to Cut Mladic Indictment](#) from last week.)

The core elements of the case – the siege of Sarajevo, the massacre at Srebrenica, crimes committed in various municipalities, and the taking of United Nations hostages – remains the same, and the indictment will still contain 11 counts.

**Rachel Irwin is an IWPR reporter in The Hague.**

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