

Rajic Denied Early Release

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Judge rules that gravity of crimes committed by former commander means he must stay in prison.

Bosnian Croat army commander Ivica Rajic was denied early release from prison this week.

In 2005, Rajic pleaded guilty to commanding an October 1993 attack in central Bosnia which destroyed the village of Stupni Do and resulted in the murder of at least 37 Bosniak men, women and children. His forces also looted the town of Vares, after which they detained some 250 Bosniak men, abused their families, and sexually assaulted female inhabitants.

At the sentencing hearing in April 2006, Rajic told judges that he would accept their sentence and judgment "bravely and courageously".

"I am very sorry for all the victims and suffering that took place in Stupni Do and Vares," he said at the 2006 hearing. "Those victims were unnecessary, just as the war between two friendly nations was unnecessary."

Rajic was given a sentence of 12 years and transferred in 2007 to a Spanish prison with which the Hague tribunal has an agreement.

In his decision this week, Hague tribunal president Judge Patrick Robinson stated that Rajic had not yet served two-thirds of his sentence and concluded that his crimes were of "very high gravity".

Judge Robinson also pointed out that forces under Rajic's command fired at United Nations Protection Force, UNPROFOR, personnel carriers and at the UNPROFOR headquarters in the Vares municipality. In addition, the judge noted that Rajic "participated in a cover-up of the crimes committed during the attacks in and around Vares.

"The gravity of Mr Rajic's crimes is very high, and I do not consider that the time that he has served in detention militates in favour of his release," the judge concluded.

Rachel Irwin is an IWPR reporter in The Hague.

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