

Sarajevo Trial Examines Civilian Suffering

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Dragomir Milosevic's defence begin their case claiming there was no deliberate attempt to harm non-combatants.

Lawyers defending Dragomir Milosevic this week denied that troops under the command of the Bosnian Serb general targeted Sarajevo residents and said the casualties during the siege were the inevitable consequence of an armed conflict between two warring armies.

Milosevic, the former commander of the Bosnian Serb Sarajevo Romanija Corps, SRK, is charged with seven counts of crimes against humanity and violations of laws and customs of war for conducting a campaign of sniping and shelling attacks on the city of Sarajevo.

The indictment says that the attacks killed and wounded thousands of civilians tending vegetable plots, queuing for bread, collecting water, shopping or walking with children and friends. People were also killed and injured in their homes from bullets that came through the windows.

Prosecutors brought in witnesses who suggested that the sniping and shelling campaign was deliberate and widespread, and intended to gain military advantage over the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina, ABiH.

They claim that Milosevic had almost 18,000 troops under his control and deployed them to spread terror among the people of Sarajevo.

Milosevic's lawyers deny that the campaign was targeted at civilians with the aim of terrorising them, or that the general knew about any crimes committed by his subordinates.

They also contend that it was impossible for Milosevic to have inherited criminal responsibility from General Stanislav Galic from whom Milosevic took over command in August 1994. Galic was recently sentenced on appeal to life imprisonment for his role in the siege of Sarajevo.

Milosevic's lawyer Branislav Tapuskovic this week opened the defence case by describing the situation in Sarajevo at the time as "urban warfare".

He said the SRK and the ABiH were fighting at close quarters on city streets and that the suffering of civilians was the result of that engagement, not a deliberate attempt to target them by snipers in the hills above Sarajevo.

Tapuskovic also suggested that ABiH troops attacked civilians and quoted British war correspondent and prosecution witness Martin Bell who told the tribunal in April that neither side had a "monopoly over human suffering".

"The indictment implies that the SRK campaign went on by itself, as if there was nothing on the other side," said Tapuskovic.

Defence witnesses will number 63 and include those who fought in Sarajevo at the time, as well as international observers, said Tapuskovic.

The defence team had asked judges for 171 hours of court time to examine those witnesses, a figure Judge Patrick Robinson cut to 145 hours - urging the defence to reduce the number of witnesses called as some appeared to overlap with each other.

The judge said he expects the defence to rest by August 24.

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