

Seselj Again Refuses to Enter Plea

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Hague contempt case against leader of Serbian Radical Party inches forward.

Serbian nationalist politician Vojislav Seselj once again refused to enter a plea to contempt charges at the Hague tribunal this week and demanded that the prosecutor turn over certain documents.

Seselj wants documents that the tribunal's registry gave to the prosecutor, Bruce MacFarlane, concerning the case.

Seselj told the court that if the documents are not provided, it might as well "terminate these proceedings".

"The sooner you get them to me, the fewer problems there will be," exclaimed Seselj, who represents himself in the case.

Judge Burton Hall responded that Seselj already has the documents he is entitled to.

"The position of the trial chamber is that the accused has all of the material he is required to be given," he said.

Judge Hall then directed the registry to enter a not guilty plea on Seselj's behalf.

Seselj had refused to enter a plea at his initial appearance on April 29. He had ten days to do so, which is why another hearing was convened on May 6.

Judge Hall said last week the contempt proceedings cannot immediately move forward because of Seselj's motion to disqualify Judges O-Gon Kwon and Kevin Parker from the case.

Seselj's April 12 motion was only made public this week because it repeatedly used the titles of two books he wrote, which refer to Judges Kwon and Parker. The titles "contain offensive language that is inappropriate for submissions that are to be filed publicly before this tribunal", Judge Kwon wrote on April 27, in an order for the titles to be removed from public documents.

In the public version of Seselj's 44-page motion, he claimed Judges Kwon and Parker are "biased and zealous" and seeking revenge against him.

Among his many claims, Seselj contends that Judges Kwon and Parker sentenced him to an "unprecedented, scandalous and draconian" prison sentence of 15 months after his first contempt trial last year.

In both that case and the most recent one, Seselj is accused of knowingly revealing names of protected witnesses in books he has written.

Seselj said the titles are directly linked to the prison sentence imposed on him.

He says that these "harsh" titles would "certainly provoke in these judges even greater bias... and hatred of Professor Vojislav Seselj".

Furthermore, the publication of the books "in essence destroyed any possibility" of the two judges being "impartial and neutral".

He also suggested that the new contempt proceedings were brought against him because of the titles of the books.

"Whether someone likes these titles or whether anyone is insulted by them are not questions over which new proceedings for contempt of the tribunal need to be instigated," Seselj said.

He called for Judges Kwon and Parker to be disqualified because they had heard his previous contempt case.

Court spokeswoman Nerma Jelacic said she could not comment on the content of motions before the tribunal.

This week, Judge Hall reiterated that because of Seselj's motion, a particular procedure has to be followed and that the contempt proceedings will continue in "due course".

In parallel criminal proceedings, Seselj is charged with nine counts of war crimes and crimes against humanity - including murder, torture and forcible transfer - for atrocities carried out between August 1991 and September 1993, in an effort to expel the non-Serb population from parts of Croatia and Bosnia.

Arrested in 2003, Seselj remains leader of the Serbian Radical Party, SRS, based in Belgrade.

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