

## **Trbic Sentenced to 30 Years for Genocide**

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Former Bosnian Serb officer found guilty of involvement in Srebrenica killings.

A Bosnian Serb former army chief has been sentenced to 30 years in prison on a charge of genocide for his role in the 1995 Srebrenica massacre of 8,000 Bosniak men and boys.

Milorad Trbic, the former assistant chief of security of the Zvornik brigade of the Bosnian Serb Army, VRS, is the highest-ranking army official to stand trial at the war crimes court in Sarajevo and the first indictee to answer to genocide charges there.

This week, he was found guilty of involvement in the persecution, detention and execution of Bosnian Muslims from the Srebrenica enclave, as well as in the burial and re-burial of bodies in order to hide evidence of the crimes.

"From July 10 to November 30, 1995, Milorad Trbic took part in a widespread systematic attack which was directed against the Bosniak people in the enclave of Srebrenica, all with the aim of carrying out an operation of cleansing the civilian Bosniak population," said presiding judge Davorin Jukic.

Trbic was originally charged at the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, ICTY, along with former senior Bosnian Serb police and army officers Vinko Pandurevic, Ljubisa Beara, Ljubomir Borovcanin, Milan Gvero, Radivoje Miletic, Drago Nikolic and Vujadin Popovic.

The seven have been on trial for murder, persecutions, forcible transfer and deportation committed in the Srebrenica enclave in July 1995. All apart from Miletic and Gvero are also accused of extermination and genocide-related charges. The prosecution and defence presented their closing arguments in September this year, with the verdict due in a few months time.

Trbic's case was transferred to the Bosnian court from the Hague tribunal in June 2007 and the Bosnian court confirmed the original indictment brought by Hague prosecutors against Trbic the following month.

The judgement confirms Trbic's responsibility in a series of crimes committed in the zone of responsibility of the Zvornik brigade.

According to the verdict, it was Trbic who chose "the sites where Bosniaks would be imprisoned, determined who would secure these sites. He also played a part in crimes committed in Zvornik municipality, where he either participated in or assisted murders of men from Srebrenica in Kozluk, at the school in Petkovci, at the Branjevo military estate, in Orahovac, the school in Rocevic and during the executions at Brana, Kula Grad and Milici".

"On July 14, at Pilica in Zvornik municipality, in front of the school gym, Milorad Trbic opened fire, together with other VRS combatants, thus executing up to 20 Bosniak men from the Srebrenica enclave. The executed men were previously imprisoned in the gym. Trbic did this in order to terrify, subdue and control the other prisoners," said Judge Jukic, delivering the verdict.

"At the Petkovci dam, Trbic personally oversaw the murders of at least 179 people."

Judge Jukic continued, "Trbic provided VRS troops on the ground with fuel and ammunition for the executions of men from Srebrenica, and provided continuous logistic support. Inter alia, he provided support to the troops at Pilica, where 1,200 Bosniaks were killed."

The judge said Trbic was also found guilty of having "overseen, managed and coordinated activities [relating to] the burial of victims in unmarked mass graves, and their reburial at secondary sites, in order to keep their remains and identities secret".

However, Trbic was found not guilty of charges including the imprisonment, abuse and murder of Bosniaks at Potocari, and executions at different sites in the Bratunac area.

Judge Jukic concluded that there was insufficient evidence to convict Trbic of crimes committed outside of the zone of responsibility of the Zvornik brigade.

His acquittal on these charges – and the sentence of 30 years, rather than the maximum of 45 the prosecution had asked for – led to anger among some victims.

Many representatives of survivor organisations left the courtroom before the end of the verdict's delivery.

"This is a shameful judgement," Zumra Sehomeric, of the Srebrenica Enclave Mothers' Movement, told IWPR. "He should have rather been freed on all counts, as I don't grasp what kind of satisfaction this should pose to the victims. This is a clear message to the criminals that crimes can indeed go by unpunished. He should have been sentenced to 45 years in prison, in order to demonstrate that all those who commit genocide will be properly punished."

Boris Grubestic, spokesman for the prosecutors' office, told IWPR that the team would probably launch an appeal against the length of the sentence, and defence attorney Milan Trbojevic said they would "most certainly" appeal against the verdict.

"I claim that it is a wrong, bad, unreasoned verdict and I don't believe that this is where things end," he said.

Velma Saric is an IWPR-trained journalist in Sarajevo.

**Location:** Balkans

**Topic:** Courtside

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