

Witness Says Seselj Demanded Killing of Children

Author: [Simon Jennings](#)

He claims he heard Serbian nationalist leader making the demand at 1992 rally in northern Serbia. A Croat this week testified that a Serbian nationalist leader incited supporters to move into Croat-owned houses and to kill children of mixed Serb-Croat marriages.

Franja Baricevic was addressing the trial of Vojislav Seselj, leader of the Serbian Radical Party, SRS, who is in the dock at the International Criminal Tribunal for former Yugoslavia, ICTY. He is accused of involvement in the murder, expulsion, and mistreatment of non-Serb civilians and the looting of their property.

Baricevic worked in the village of Hrtkovci in northern Serbia in 1992, and said he was present at a rally given by Seselj there at which the accused told his audience – comprising mainly Serb refugees from Croatia – that Croats must leave.

“[Seselj] said that Serb refugees did not have a roof over their heads and that Croats had to leave the village within three days,” said Baricevic. “They would get keys and addresses [for houses in Croatia] and have to leave the village.

“He said the following: [couples in] mixed marriages should be divorced and children from mixed marriages should be killed.”

Another witness who had also been present at Seselj’s address on May 6 – and who testified before the court last week – told judges that he heard him say no such thing.

Judge Jean-Claude Antonetti therefore sought clarification from Baricevic.

“[I am] 100 per cent sure [Seselj said that],” replied Baricevic. He added later, “I do not know how come [the previous witness] did not hear that and how come he did not say so, but that was stated at that rally.”

Before the first Serb refugees arrived from Croatia in 1992, Hrtkovci, a village in the Ruma municipality, had a majority Croat population. The prosecution alleges that its Croat residents were forced to leave at Seselj’s instigation, and had their houses seized by the Serb refugees.

This week, Baricevic said Serb refugees from Croatia had been promised homes in the village by the Serb authorities in Slavonia in eastern Croatia, who told them that Croat residents were leaving to join the Ustashe – a term for Croatian Nazi collaborators in the Second World War, but also used to refer to Croatian nationalist paramilitaries.

However, the refugees arrived in Hrtkovci to find its Croat residents still living there, he said.

The witness explained that Seselj came to the village to meet the Serb refugees, who complained that

they now had nowhere to live.

“[Refugees] wanted Seselj to come personally to the village and hold this meeting with them,” said Baricevic.

Seselj, however, contends that the event was not such a meeting, but a rally held for supporters before local and federal elections held later that month.

In his cross-examination, Seselj asked the witness how the rally could have been a meeting when it involved him speaking to the refugees, but the refugees not speaking to him.

“Did anybody talk to me? Could anybody talk to me? Was I the only one who spoke?” he asked. The witness confirmed that no-one in the audience spoke to Seselj during his address.

Questioned further by Antonetti, Baricevic said Seselj “gave people guidelines as to what it was they should do... whether he stayed on to talk to people or not, that is something I really don’t know”.

The witness said that after Seselj’s speech, the situation in the village became very heated.

“Groups of people broke into houses. They forced people out of their homes,” he said.

“Within one month of the rally, 300 [Croat] households had moved out.”

Baricevic said he himself felt forced to leave, and on May 19, he exchanged his house with a refugee. He said he received threats every day.

“I had to choose the best option out of many bad ones,” he said, explaining why he left.

During his testimony, the witness also confirmed that Ostoja Subincic – listed in the prosecution’s pre-trial brief as Seselj’s contact in the village – was a member of the SRS.

The prosecution alleges in its pre-trial brief that on their arrival in Hrtkovci, “refugees were referred to Ostoja Sibincic, an SRS member and associate of Seselj in Hrtkovci, who would give them addresses of houses owned by Croats”.

“[Subincic] came to Ruma to work as a municipality clerk and he led Seselj’s party there. He was a very active [SRS] member,” said the witness.

“All those people, all those refugees turned to him personally and he provided them with addresses of people who were working abroad.”

According to Baricevic, tension erupted in the village when homeowners who had been working abroad returned to Hrtkovci on annual leave to find their houses had been given to refugees.

“People had to start locking their doors and report to other people what the situation was like in the village,” he said.

Seselj used his cross-examination to try to expose the witness as having been tutored in what to say by the prosecution – particularly in relation to his testimony about the accused calling for children from mixed marriages to be killed.

He asked how many conversations Baricevic had had with prosecutors since his arrival in The Hague, and what they had told him about that particular allegation.

“They asked me if you said that and I confirmed it,” replied Baricevic.

Seselj also questioned the prosecution allegation that during his speech of May 1992, he read out a list of names of prominent non-Serbs who were to leave Hrtkovci.

“In my speech, there were no names of local persons, isn’t that right?” he asked the witness.

“No, that’s not right,” replied Baricevic, adding that he himself was on the list.

Simon Jennings is an IWPR reporter in The Hague.

Location: Balkans
Serbia
Croatia

Topic: Courtside

Focus: International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia

Source URL: <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/witness-says-seselj-demanded-killing-children>