

Witness Speaks of Persecution of Non-Serbs

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Stanisic, Zupljanin trial hears of repressive measures introduced in Banja Luka.

A prosecution witness in the trial of two former Bosnian Serb police chiefs this week told the Hague tribunal that non-Serbs had been denied basic human rights in Banja Luka between 1992 and 1995.

Muharem Krzic, the former chairman of the Party of Democratic Action in Banja Luka, told the trial of Mico Stanisic and Stojan Zupljanin that "Bosnian Muslims, Croats and others were forced to leave their workplaces and their homes, their property was destroyed and they were threatened in various ways".

Zupljanin, who became an adviser to the Bosnian Serb president and Hague indictee Radovan Karadzic in 1994, is accused of the extermination, murder, persecution, and deportation of non-Serbs in north-western Bosnia between April and December 1992.

Stanisic is charged with the murder, torture and cruel treatment of non-Serb civilians, as well as for his failure to prevent or punish crimes committed by his subordinates.

Stanisic and Zupljanin are alleged to have participated in a joint criminal enterprise aimed at the permanent removal of non-Serbs from the territory of an intended Serbian state. They are accused of crimes committed between April 1 and December 31, 1992, in 20 municipalities throughout Bosnia and Hercegovina, BiH.

According to the indictment, the former Bosnian Serb police commanders are held responsible for "imposing and maintaining restrictive measures against Bosnian Muslims and Croats", having thereby perpetrated, according to the indictment, persecution on political, racial or religious basis, qualified as a crime against humanity.

On September 16, 1991, the SDS proclaimed a Serb autonomous entity in the Krajina region of north-western Bosnia, ARK.

According to the indictment, Zupljanin was a member of the Bosanska Krajina autonomous regions crisis headquarters in Banja Luka.

Krzic, who was forced to leave Banja Luka in late October 1993 and went to Zagreb, began his testimony by saying that he was aware of the existence of the ARK crisis staff in Banja Luka, a city which he said had become "a concentration camp".

He continued, "I most often found out about ARK crisis staff decisions through statements by officials in media. Staff representatives would usually personally announce their decisions in print, radio and television."

Asked by the prosecutor what the role of the ARK crisis staff was, the witness answered, "Its role was to

announce mobilisation, order actions around non-Serb property, dismiss non-Serbs from workplaces. It was a wide variety of decisions ranging from strictly military questions to issues touching upon the security of non-Serbs not just in Banja Luka, but elsewhere in Bosnia and Hercegovina, too.

“All decisions taken by the ARK crisis staff were implemented unquestioningly and the results could be seen on the ground.

“One such ARK crisis staff decision was to fire all non-Serbs from their workplace in 1992. That decision had resulted in all non-Serbs being fired from their workplaces in public companies.”

He said that at the time “99 per cent of people were employed by public companies”.

The witness added that the first mass dismissal happened at the hospital, where in a matter of weeks more than 400 doctors and other medical personnel were made redundant, followed by employees in education, media and other enterprises.

“After the non-Serbs would lose their jobs, their companies would also see to it that their property be expropriated,” he said.

“The security situation later in Banja Luka turned even worse. People who'd lost their job had to apply at a separate migration agency, which was exclusively set up for that purpose. If people would not agree to peaceful expulsion and transfer of all property, then physical and psychological abuse would be used.”

The witness said that a rigorous curfew was introduced in Banja Luka. “Violating the curfew meant not just a violation, but a threat of death to all non-Serbs,” he said.

According to Krzic, “everyone who wandered around Banja Luka streets between 10 pm and 5 am risked losing his head”.

In addition to the curfew, the witness claimed that there were checkpoints established which were under the control of Bosnian Serb police. The aim of these checkpoints was to prevent movement by Muslims, Croats and others. The witness claimed non-Serbs would be stopped at these checkpoints and their identification documents checked.

The witness went on to claim that police would sometimes confiscate the documents, a measure which was intended, along with the checkpoints themselves, to prevent the movement of non-Serbs around town.

Stanisic surrendered to the Hague tribunal in March 2005. Zupljanin was in hiding until June that same year, when he was arrested in the town of Pancevo just outside the Serbian capital Belgrade. Both the accused pleaded not guilty and their trial began on September 2008.

The trial continues next week.

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