



Genocide in Bosnia 1992-1995

Although many different ethnic and religious groups had resided together for 40 years under Yugoslavia's repressive communist government, this changed when the country began to collapse during the fall of communism in the early 1990s. The provinces of Slovenia and Croatia declared independence, and war quickly followed between Serbia and these breakaway republics. Ethnic tensions were brought to the forefront, and people who had lived peacefully for years as neighbors turned against each other and took up arms. When Bosnia attempted to secede, Serbia – under Slobodan Milošević's leadership – invaded with the claim that it was there to “free” fellow Serbian Orthodox Christians living in Bosnia.

Starting in April 1992, Serbia set out to “ethnically cleanse” Bosnian territory by systematically removing all Bosnian Muslims, known as Bosniaks. Serbia, together with ethnic Bosnian Serbs, attacked Bosniaks with former Yugoslavian military equipment and surrounded Sarajevo, the capital city. Many Bosniaks were driven into concentration camps, where women and girls were systematically gang-raped and other civilians were tortured, starved and murdered.

In 1993, the United Nations (UN) Security Council declared that Sarajevo, Gorazde, Srebrenica and other Muslim enclaves were to be safe areas, protected by a contingent of UN peacekeepers. But in July 1995, Serbs committed the largest massacre in Europe since World War II in one such area, Srebrenica. An estimated 23,000 women, children and elderly people were put on buses and driven to Muslim-controlled territory, while 8,000 “battle-age” men were detained and slaughtered. The so-called safe area of Srebrenica fell without a single shot fired by the UN.

In 1994, NATO initiated air strikes against Bosnian Serbs to stop the attacks. In December 1995, U.S.-led negotiations in Dayton, Ohio (The Dayton Peace Accords) ended the conflict in Bosnia, and a force was created to maintain the ceasefire. Since the end of the conflict, the International Criminal Tribunal for Yugoslavia (ICTY) at The Hague has charged more than 160 persons. Convictions have included Serb, Croat and Bosniaks, though Serbians and Bosnian Serbs have faced the majority of charges. In 2001, former-President Milošević was captured, but he died in his cell in 2006. Radovan Karadžić, the supreme commander of the Bosnian Serb armed forces, was captured in 2008, and is being tried in The Hague on genocide charges. Ratko Mladić, chief of staff of the Bosnian Serb Army, was captured in May 2011 and is charged with 11 counts, including genocide and crimes against humanity.

Resources on This Topic

Books:

- “Genocide: Modern Crimes Against Humanity,” by Brendan January
- “The Myth of Ethnic War: Serbia and Croatia in the 1990s,” by V.P. Ganon
- “The Fall of Yugoslavia,” by Misha Glenny
- “Genocide in Bosnia: The Policy of Ethnic Cleansing,” by Norman Cigar

Web sites:

- <http://www.genocidewatch.org/>
- http://www.gendercide.org/case_bosnia.html
- <http://www.icty.org/>

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