



PROSECUTOR BRINGS CHARGES AGAINST GNJILANE GROUP

The Serbian War Crimes Prosecutor has issued an indictment against 17 individuals - members of the so-called 'Gnjilane Group', which operated as part of the Kosovo Liberation Army (UCK) - for a war crime against civilian population committed in the area of Gnjilane in the period between June and September 1999. As a result of the said criminal event, at least 52 Serbs, Roma and Albanians were brutally killed, whereas a great number of women fell victim to rapes.

According to the indictment allegations, Fazlija AJDARI (the principal indictee), Rexhep ALIJI and Shaqir SHAQIRI - at the time officers of the UCK operational centre for the Gnjilane area and currently at large - ordered a number of criminal operations to be carried out at three locations in Gnjilane. Acting upon their orders, the other indictees: Shefket MUSLIJU, Sadik ALIJI, Idriz ALIJI, Agush MEMISHI, Faton HAJDARI, Shemsija NUHIJU, Ahmet HASANI, Nazif HASANI, Ramadan HALIMI, Samet HAJDARI, Ferat HAJDARI, Kamber SAHITI, Selimon SADIKU and Burim FAZLIJU engaged in unlawful arrests, rapes, inhumane treatment, torturing, mutilation and killing of civilians, with a view to expelling the remaining Serb population from the area and from the overall territory of Kosovo and Metohija.

According to one count of the indictment, the secondary indictee, Rexhep ALIJI, ordered all members of the said UCK unit to assemble in the courtyard of the local boarding school "in order to see how Serbs should be killed". Another indictee, Sadik ALIJI, came to the spot in an Ascona passenger car with Vranje number plates, carrying two men and an elderly woman of Serb nationality. After the three had been removed from the vehicle, the woman got one of her legs affixed to the Ascona, and the other to a Zastava 128 passenger car, whereupon Sadik ALIJI ordered that the vehicles move in two opposite directions and instructed the drivers: "Move slowly, do not take her soul too soon!" In subsequence, they applied the same manner to affix the victim's arms to the vehicles and tear them off her body. As the woman's mutilated body remained lying on the ground, a man was removed from the boot of the car and subjected to the same 'procedure'. In the presence of other members of their unit, the perpetrators then axed the victims' bodies into pieces, which they put in sacks and carried away to several different locations. The third victim from the car was taken to the cellar of the boarding school building, where he underwent the same procedure as others who were locked inside. In the course of the so-called 'PROCEDURE', the prisoners were mutilated and tortured to death, they got their fingers broken, nails and teeth pulled out, throats cut through and tongs stabbed with knives; furthermore, they were hit with metal rods over the head, stabbed in the body, shot with firearms, beaten and otherwise physically abused.

Following the stoppage of the FRY - NATO hostilities and the withdrawal of the FRY forces from the Kosovo territory, the indictees - who were members of the 138th Brigade and other UCK units originally based outside Kosovo and Metohija - were transferred to Gnjilane in mid-June 1999.

The Prosecutor proposes that 9 indictees be placed under detention on remand, whereas the remaining 8, who are at large, should be tried in absentia.

Nine members of the Kosovo Liberation Army were arrested and placed under custody on 26 December 2008.