

Case: Branko Grujić *et al* – ‘Zvornik’
War Crimes Chamber
Belgrade District Court, Republic of Serbia
Case number: KV.5/05

Trial Chamber: Tatjana Vuković, Trial Chamber President, Vesko Krstajić, Judge, Trial Chamber Member, Olivera Anđelković, Judge, Trial Chamber Member

War Crimes Prosecutor: Milan Petrović

Accused: Branko Grujić, Branko Popović, Dragan Slavković a.k.a. Toro, Ivan Korać a.k.a. Zoks, Siniša Filipović a.k.a. Lopov, and Dragutin Dragičević a.k.a. Bosanac

Report: Nataša Kandić, Executive Director of the Humanitarian Law Centre (HLC), and Dragoljub Todorović, Attorney, victims representatives

25 April 2006

Examination of witness Jasna Buljubašić

The witness is the widow of the victim, Abdulah Buljubašić a.k.a. Bubica, who was arrested and murdered in Zvornik in the second half of May 1992. Before the war she worked as a legal officer at the Glinica factory in Zvornik. Her late husband was the driver of the factory’s general manager, Jefta Subotić.

The attack on and occupation of Zvornik

The witness said that life went on as usual in Zvornik until the morning of 6 April. It was a Monday and her husband had gone to Belgrade to drive back the factory’s general manager, Jefto Subotić, who used to spend weekends in Belgrade. Buljubašić made this Monday journey to Belgrade and back to Zvornik regularly. On her way to the factory the witness encountered a barricade manned by armed men who stopped her and did not let her continue to her workplace along her usual route. So she had to make a detour via Mali Zvornik. On the way she asked people she knew why the barricades had been erected and what it was all about. She was told that the night before a Muslim had killed a Serb sergeant in a village near Zvornik but she forgot the name of the village. On arriving at the Glinica factory she saw that a good many workers had not reported to work. In the meantime, her husband had come back from Belgrade and told her that the general manager no longer lived in Zvornik. The Buljubašić and Subotić families lived in the same building. Buljubašić told his wife that he had taken Subotić to Banja Koviljača. The witness heard that the Serb policemen had seized the weapons from the SUP building, that the SUP had split into Serbs and Muslims, that the police had arrested two of Arkan’s men, that the situation in Zvornik was tense and that a conflict was in the air. Next day, 7 April she heard deafening machinegun fire, people ran to the shelters, and Radio Zvornik broadcast the following appeal: ‘Citizens of Zvornik, the town has been attacked. Unidentified armed persons are attacking the town from all sides. The women, children and elderly are to go into the shelters. The men to the positions prepared. Young people of Zvornik, if you love your town come out and defend it!’ After this the radio station went off the air. The witness took to a shelter with her

children. Sometime that afternoon the radio resumed broadcasts: ‘This is Serb Radio Zvornik, Željko Ražnatović Arkan speaking. Citizens of Zvornik, the town has been liberated. You are free to leave the shelters and return to your houses and flats. Any murder and looting will be punished by death.’

The Buljubašić family emigrates to Germany

In Zvornik, which had been declared a Serb city, all hell broke loose. Bosniaks were murdered, thrown out of their homes, robbed, and maltreated in various ways. The town’s leading Bosniak citizens were shot, including the director of the veterinary station, Izet Sabirović, and the Gymnasium [grammar school] mathematics teacher, Fehim Kujundžić. The company car the witness’s husband drove and the Renault 18 car owned by her husband’s relative were seized, and the Glinica financial manager, Mirsad Hasanović, was arrested. One of Šešelj’s men whom Buljubašić had known well for many years said when they ran into each other, ‘Bubica, what are you doing here? Word is that you were seen on top of a building with a sniping rifle in your hand. Run away, you fool, they’re out to kill you.’

The witness, her husband, their two children, and Jasna’s mother went to Mali Zvornik and put up with their friend Mile Tadić. After some time Tadić provided a car and a driver, a man by name Lozanović, to take them to Belgrade. In Belgrade they stayed with their close family friends the Deliće, and they also had a talk with Jefta Subotić and his wife. Also in Belgrade, the manager of a firm with which the Glinica factory cooperated told them that all kinds of rumours circulated about Buljubašić, that he had done this and that and been told off, together with some Muslims, to kill Jefta Subotić. On 14 April 1992, the witness’s two children and her mother went to Germany where the witness’s sister lived.

Jasna and her late husband learned from Subotić and his friends in Belgrade that Bubica had been accused of various crimes, so he resolved to return to Zvornik, to expose the allegations as lies, and to clear his name.

Subotić told him that another driver, a man named Tanacković, was coming to pick him up and take him to Zvornik, and that he should go to the police, have the matter out and disprove the charges. The witness returned to Zvornik with her husband and Subotić. They reported to the police on their premises at the Standard factory in Karakaj and left the passport and foreign exchange with Subotić and Tanacković for safekeeping. At the factory they were received by a man who introduced himself as Marko Pavlović, who wrote down their particulars and engaged in a friendly conversation with them. Buljubašić told him about the charge that he was planning the assassination of Jefta Subotić and that it was not true; Pavlović replied that Buljubašić had done well to report and that there were no problems; he also issued them with passes and advised them not to stay in the town too long because there was a war on. They put up with Mile Tadić who said on one occasion that he did not feel at ease with them in his home. Buljubašić then rang up Subotić, his boss whose driver he had been for years, and told him that he and his wife should go to Germany, whereupon Subotić replied that perhaps that was the best solution. They left for Germany on 20 April 1992.

The arrest and murder of Abdulah Buljubašić a.k.a. Bubica

The witness and her late husband stayed in Germany until 9 May and returned to Zvornik. They had meanwhile been informed that Radio Zvornik had announced that all who had left the town and intended to return would have to do so by 15 May. Those who did not, it was said, would lose their flats, all their property, and jobs. On 11 May they set out for the Zvornik municipal building, leaving their foreign exchange with Mile Tadić. Near the building, Abdulah pointed to

Jasna a man by name of Zebić who worked at the Glinica factory; after this Jasna saw and greeted her colleague Vera Plazinić; next thing, Jasna saw a man searching Abdulah, who stood with his armed raised. She later learned that the man's first name was Mile. Then she saw Zebić grab Abdulah by the arm and frogmarch him down the street. The witness never saw her late husband after his arrest.

The witness next spoke about her ordeal in Zvornik including abuse, exchanges and confrontations with many people, insults to her person and dignity, and so on. She described her contacts with the man Mile who had arrested Buljubašić, with Zebić, with a man called Gogić, all of whom were in touch with her all the time assuring her that they were looking after her. She also described her meetings with neighbours and friends Zoran Jovanović and Perišić who did not want to help her at all.

The witness kept in constant touch with Major Marko Pavlović from the moment Buljubašić was arrested to the moment she learned of his killing. Pavlović told her that her husband had committed terrible things and that he had sent him to prison. He told her that he was seeing Buljubašić and that he was well, but never gave her the permission to see him. Pavlović told her that she was not allowed to leave the town, that her husband was under investigation, and that he could give her no news. In the end, Pavlović told her, 'Your husband doesn't deserve to live...Go away and make a new life for yourself and your children, there's no hope for him.' The witness realized that her husband was in great danger and wrote a letter to Pavlović, which she delivered herself, asking Pavlović to let her see her husband at least for the last time and that she had heard that he was imprisoned at 'Ekonomija'. On 19 May, however, Zebić called on her, expressed his condolences and said that Buljubašić had been shot. The witness left Zvornik and returned to her relatives in Germany.