

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

29 November 2005

Branko Grujić’s defence

Count two: The Čelopek Cultural Centre crimes

At the end of 1992, the accused said, the Government was informed that the residents of Divič wanted to talk to someone in authority, so the Government delegated the TO Staff commander, the accused Branko Popović. On his return from Divič, Popović told the Government that the residents of Divič wanted to move to a territory under Muslim control because they would feel more secure there. The Government met and agreed that deputy Jovo Mijatović should appoint a place along the line of separation between the Serb and Muslim armies at which they could cross safely to what they regarded as free territory. A few days later Mijatović informed the Government that he had made arrangements for the residents to cross the line at Han Pijesak and to proceed from there to Kladanj under Muslim escort. The Government laid on buses and all the residents left for Han Pijesak about 20 May. Grujić insisted that he was not present at the time of their departure and did not accompany them. The buses were escorted by police. The next day, during a Government meeting in Zvornik, Grujić saw a number of buses outside the Government building; a policeman who had been in the escort walked in and said that the passengers were back because they had not been permitted by the Muslims to enter the territory under their control. The Government decided to direct the residents of Divič to Tuzla although no crossing arrangements had been made. Grujić insisted that the Government had no other choice and had to send them somewhere. The residents failed to enter [Muslim] territory in the direction of Tuzla too and returned to Zvornik once more. At that point someone suggested to separate the men from the women and children. Grujić said that he learned of the separation a day or two later and that the Government was notified of it by SUP Chief Miloš Pantelić, who said that all men fit for military service had been separated and would be sent to the collection centre in Batković, adding that he had already got in touch with the centre. Grujić next said that he had had no information about the fate of the residents of Divič until the brothers Vučković were tried before

the Šabac District Court, when he read in the press about the treatment the Divič men fit for military service suffered in the Čelopek camp.

Answering questions by the Trial Chamber President, the accused explained that 'Novi izvor' was the name of a company's administrative building, which was completely empty and situated in the centre of Zvornik 100 or so metres from the Government building; he also explained that the Misdemeanour Court building was near the SUP and Government buildings, also in the town centre. He denied any knowledge of any persons having been kept on the premises of 'Novi izvor' and of the Misdemeanour Court in spite of their proximity to the Government building, saying he had far too much work to do.

Count three: The 'Ekonomija' and 'Ciglana' crimes

Grujić insisted that prior to the start of the criminal proceedings he had had no knowledge whatever of the Čelopek, 'Ekonomija' [Farm] and 'Ciglana' [Brickworks] camps and of the killing and torture of prisoners that occurred in those camps.

The production of cash payment orders to meet the needs of volunteers from Serbia

The accused said that no payment of money could have been made without a decision of the Provisional Government and that a separate monthly payment schedule, subject to approval by TO Staff Commander Branko Popović, had been drawn up to cover the needs of the entire army. At that time all the armed forces, military and police, were under the command of the Zvornik TO Staff headed by Marko Pavlović, that is, Branko Popović.