

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

8 and 9 May 2006

Examination of witness K

Witness K was the vice-president of the Zvornik Municipal Board and, for a short time, a member of the Main SDS Board. He was also the commander of the Zvornik police station from August 1991 to 16 April 1992. At the time he resigned from this post he was no longer a member of the SDS. The post of the police station commander was tied to membership of the Crisis Headquarters.

The witness said that following the establishment of national parties in Bosnia and Herzegovina a total division set in between Bosniaks and Serbs. In the spring of 1992, under political pressure, the SUP distributed weapons to Serbs at will: in the beginning it gave them legal permits for the weapons, but later it armed them through the JNA reserve formations and in other ways. People were armed en masse and even reserve battalions were set up in ethnically pure Serb villages. A Bosniak armed formation called the Patriotic League was established in the village of Goduš near Zvornik in October 1991.

The attack on Zvornik

On 6 April there was a meeting in the Hotel Jezero in Mali Zvornik. It was attended by the mayor of the pre-war Municipality of Zvornik, Pašić, the commander of the pre-war TO, Alija Kapičić, Branko Grujić, Jovo Mijatović, Captain Dragan Obrenović, the witness, and several other persons. The object was to reach an agreement and avoid armed conflict. The meeting took place after the SUP division, with the Serb members establishing themselves in Karakaj and the Bosniaks headed by Mustafić remaining on the SUP premises in the town. Two days later another meeting was held in the same hotel and was attended by Arkan, Kapičić, Pašić, Mijatović, Ivanović, Radić, and Grujić. It was there that Arkan slapped the Serb representatives and appointed witness K president of the Crisis Headquarters after dismissing Grujić; Arkan did not abuse the Bosniak representatives. The witness said, ‘The decision was taken to advance on Zvornik and that’s what was done. I think that it was in the morning, at about 4 o’clock, that Zvornik was taken mostly by Arkan’s units assisted by some of the residents.’ The witness said that the JNA also took part in the attack. That morning, 8 April, Legija, Repić, Žuća, and a

fellow fighter from Belgrade, who had been captured by Bosniaks, were set free. Their release was obtained by Zvornik TO Commander Marko Pavlović through Vojislav Jekić, a school friend of Osman Mustafić, head of the Bosniak SUP faction.

The witness said that the Bosniaks arrested by Arkan's unit were detained in a former store room at the Alhos factory. There was another prison facility in the SUP building, where two Serbs who had tried to rob the Invest banka were detained.

The deportation of the Kozluk Bosniaks

The witness visited Kozluk a day after the Serbs captured Zvornik, 9 April. The Serb authorities in the town had been informed that a large body of Bosniaks, reportedly 5,000-6,000 strong, were leaving Kozluk and heading for Tuzla. The men, women, children, and old people from Kozluk had been joined by fellow nationals from the village of Gornji Šepak and were sitting in lorries, tractors, and carts. The witness said that an order was received from Arkan to stop the move. Grujić, Mijatović, Bishop of Tuzla Kačavenda and Mufti Effendi Lugavić also arrived. Following discussions with the residents and with the local community president, Fadil Banjanović, and promises of food, health care, and a joint police the departure was temporarily halted. The witness drove Banjanović in his car to Zvornik, where Banjanović met Arkan's first assistant Pejić a.k.a. Peja. To reassure Banjanović, who was frightened, Pejić kissed him on the cheeks and treated him like a brother, asked him to talk the Bosniaks out of moving out, promised aid, guaranteed security, and so on. Banjanović returned to Kozluk and the Bosniaks stayed.

The Kozluk Bosniaks were not permitted to leave the village and were dismissed from work. 'It must be admitted that very soon after the Serb side assumed complete power in the municipality of Zvornik the Muslims were left without jobs.'

Between 9 April and the deportation of the Kozluk Bosniaks at the end of June, the witness paid several visits to Kozluk, talked with Banjanović, and satisfied himself that there were no armed clashes in the village. But since the front was only 4 km from the village, the Bosniak residents were under potential threat. The witness pointed out that the Serb refugees had been complaining to the authorities about the fact that while they themselves had been forced to leave their homes under Bosniak pressure, the Kozluk Bosniaks were allowed to live in theirs in peace.

Regarding the 26 June deportation of the Kozluk Bosniaks, the witness said that he did not know of any incidents having been provoked. His argument was that owing to the general situation the Kozluk Bosniaks were not safe and that no one could guarantee their security. Because the Provisional Government could not spare enough policemen and soldiers to guard the large Bosniak population of Kozluk, he said, it decided to move them out and they were satisfied with the solution. The witness pointed out, however, that this was his personal opinion. He knew that the Bosniaks were taken out in vehicles belonging to the Drina trans company.

While the witness could not say whether the deportation was forcible or voluntary, he said that he had been told by Banjanović that the Bosniaks had been opposed to the move. He said that he later learned from the media that the Kozluk Bosniaks had been deported to Hungary via Subotica. He also knew that their entire movable property was looted: the tractors, lorries, and cars disappeared and the furniture and electrical appliances were used by the Serb refugees who had moved into the empty houses. The witness estimated that some 15,000 Serb refugees had arrived from Tuzla, Ženjica, and Živinjci and that many of them were accommodated in the houses of the deported Kozluk Bosniaks.

The Čelopek and 'Ekonomija' camps

The witness said that after the capture of Kula grad the Divič Bosniaks remained in territory controlled by the Serb authorities; that they were driven in buses in the direction of Kladanj, denied entry there and turned back; that later the men were separated from the women and children and placed in the Čelopek Cultural Centre. While he did not know who took that decision and who transported them and how, he heard it said in Zvornik soon afterwards that the Bosniaks were detained in the Čelopek Cultural Centre where they were abused, injured and murdered. The witness also knew that the guards were reserve policemen. He said he never went to see the camp. While he did not discuss Čelopek with Grujić, 'Word was that men had been victimized, men had been murdered, but we only learned the details after the Hague trials started and witnesses began setting out details.' The witness heard that the prisoners were transferred from the Čelopek Cultural Centre to the camp in Batković, which was known to him as a collection centre for non-Serbs, and that from there they were taken out to be exchanged. He knew of the 'Ekonomija' agricultural estate: he was there once, saw a working party of men and recognized one of them by name Jusuf. This was early in May 1992. He saw some men feeding the animals under guard of two or three men in reserve police uniforms. He saw some 15 men in all and thought that they had been captured and detained there. The witness knew one of the policemen employed at 'Ekonomija', Sreda Vuković by name. He also knew Abdulah Buljubašić a.k.a. Bubica and said that all Zvornik knew him. He heard as late as 1993 that Bubica had been murdered after being impaled but dismissed this as Muslim propaganda though someone told him that his appeared to be true after all.