**Karadzic begins defence, denies Bosnia war crimes
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RADOVAN Karadzic, former Bosnian Serb leader, on trial accused of some of the worst atrocities in Europe since World War Two, yesterday said he should be praised for promoting peace rather than charged with war crimes, an assertion hotly denied by some victims.

Karadzic is one of three Serb leaders brought to trial in The Hague for war crimes during the violent break-up of multi-ethnic Yugoslavia between 1991 and 1999, in which more than 100,000 people were killed and millions were displaced.

Now 67 and still recognisable by his shock of white hair, he began his own defence yesterday against charges of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity, and cross-examined witnesses himself.

Looking resigned but relaxed and reading from a pre-written speech, he said Muslims had faked the circumstances of two shellings of a marketplace in the Bosnian capital Sarajevo during a siege by Serb forces. More than 100 people were killed.

“Sarajevo is my city, and any story that we would shell Sarajevo without any reason is untrue,” he said, reiterating long-standing allegations by the Serb side which have already been refuted by the Hague tribunal in an earlier case.

Prosecutors at the International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia say Karadzic was jointly responsible for the shelling of Sarajevo when Bosnian Serb forces besieged it from 1992-6.

He is also charged with being behind the massacre of 8,000 Bosnian Muslims in Srebrenica in 1995.

“Instead of being accused, I should have been rewarded for all the good things I have done. I did everything in human power to avoid the war. I succeeded in reducing the suffering of all civilians,” he told the court.

“I proclaimed numerous unilateral ceasefires and military containment. And I stopped our army many times when they were close to victory.”

Leaning forward in his chair, he emphasised points with jabs of his right hand and paused occasionally to adjust his rimless glasses.

He said the first marketplace shelling, in February 1994, in which 68 people were killed and 144 were injured, had been orchestrated, as was a second a few days later.

During the trial of Bosnian Serb General Stanislav Galic, the tribunal established that Bosnian Serb forces were responsible for shelling the market place.

For years, it seemed the main war crimes suspects in former Yugoslavia would stay out of the tribunal’s reach, until political changes in the countries of southeastern Europe made it ever more difficult for them to hide.

Karadzic was eventually arrested in 2008 in Belgrade, where he had been living in disguise as a new age health guru. The trained psychiatrist worked for a private clinic, posing as a specialist in alternative medicine under the assumed name of Dragan Dabic.

Bosnian Serb military leader Ratko Mladic eventually went on trial in The Hague this year, after 16 years on the run until his capture in a cousin’s farmhouse in Serbia in May 2011.

But former Yugoslav and Serbian president Slobodan Milosevic died in 2006 before the end of his trial.

“It was a humiliation for me that even today he is maintaining that this story was made up,” he said.

The tribunal established in the trial of local leader Milomir Stakic, who was sentenced to 40 years’ imprisonment, that detainees were beaten and tortured in camps including Trnopolje, where Alic was detained.

Karadzic was warned by a judge that reading lengthy summaries of witness depositions would eat into the 300 hours he had been allocated to defend himself.

The tribunal has indicted Croats, Muslims, Serbs and Albanians on charges of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity in the former Yugoslavia.

The majority were ethnic Serbs, including the former head of state, army chief of staff, defence minister and speaker of the parliament, and many Serbs consider the tribunal to be biased.

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Bosnian Serb military leader Ratko Mladic went on trial in The Hague this year, after 16 years on the run. Former Yugoslav and Serbian president Slobodan Milosevic died in 2006 before the end of his trial.

As Karadzic opened his defence, the tribunal also began the separate trial of its last suspect, the final chapter for an institution that has broken new ground in the investigation of conflicts and paved the way for a permanent war crimes court.

Goran Hadzic, the last of 161 suspects still alive and at large after the Yugoslav wars, is accused of murder, torture and forcible deportation at the very outset of those wars.

Prosecutors say Hadzic, president of the self-proclaimed Republic of Serbian Krajina from 1992-94, was responsible for killings and forced deportations of minority ethnic Croats from the region after Croatia broke away from Yugoslavia in 1991.

Already sentenced in his absence to a total of 40 years in prison by Croatian courts in the mid-1990s, Hadzic was finally detained by Serbian authorities in 2011.

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