

10-Year Term for a Serb in War Crimes Called Light

By MARLISE SIMONS

THE HAGUE, March 30 — Miroslav Deronjic, a confessed war criminal and an important prosecution witness in the trial of Slobodan Milosevic at the United Nations tribunal here, received a modest 10-year sentence on Tuesday. The sentence, suggested by the prosecution and accepted by two judges, seemed so light that it openly angered the leading judge in the case.

Mr. Deronjic, 49, once a high Bosnian Serb official, painted many powerful pictures in court. He described how weapons, advice and plans flowed into Bosnia from Belgrade in the early 1990's while Serbs and Bosnian Serbs prepared for war.

He spoke with eloquence and detail of the strategy to drive Bosnian Muslims from lands wanted for Serbs. He took responsibility for ordering the burning and razing of Glogova, a Muslim village where at least 64 people were killed.

For Mr. Deronjic, his guilty plea and the evidence he subsequently provided in five different trials appear to have paid off. But Judge Wolfgang Schomburg, in a strongly worded dissent, wrote that Mr. Deronjic's 10-year sentence was not proportional to the "heinous and long-planned crimes," and violated the spirit and the mandate of the tribunal.

Instead, he wrote, the crimes deserved a sentence of "no less than twenty years."

The judge's reaction is the latest example of the discomfort felt by a number of court officials since the tribunal has embarked on its new strategy to encourage plea bargaining as a way to speed up cases and clear its backlog.

The tribunal is under intense pressure, from the United States among others, to prepare itself for closing down, which means ending all investigations this year and completing trials by 2008.

As part of that exit strategy, the court is aiming to focus on the most senior suspects of war crimes from the 1990's wars and to send lower-level cases back to special courts now starting up in the Balkans.

But several judges have complained that the haste and the recent series of plea bargains is leading to sloppy work and to sentences that are too lenient.

In his dissent Tuesday, Judge Schomburg also criticized the prosecution for focusing only on the crimes of one day, in one village, Glogova, when the accused had far wider responsibilities.

He noted that there had been three different indictments, and that the last one selected only limited and arbitrary facts from one small village that was part of "a larger criminal plan."

Glogova was a small, almost entirely Muslim village of 1,913 people in eastern Bosnia that the Crisis Staff, or local war command, wanted for ethnic Serbs, according to the indictment of Mr. Deronjic.

In 1992, he ordered the police to disarm the people of Glogova, while a Serbian police chief from Belgrade assured them they would be safe because they had turned over their weapons.

But on May 9, 1992, Mr. Deronjic ordered an attack in which, he admitted in court, the village was razed and burned by members of the Yugoslav Army and the local police.

At least 64 men, women and children were killed on the spot, terrorizing the others. He said that survivors were forced on to buses and deported to Muslim-held territory.

Mr. Deronjic confessed that he was present during the operation. No appeal is expected.

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