

Prosecutors Say Document Links Milosevic to Genocide

By MARLISE SIMONS

PARIS, June 19 — Prosecutors at the war crimes trial of Slobodan Milosevic have produced what may prove to be crucial evidence in support of their case that the former Yugoslav president is guilty of genocide.

A document, the first of its kind presented to the United Nations war crimes tribunal in The Hague, is an order from the Bosnian Serb interior minister instructing special police to move into Srebrenica just days before under Bosnian Serb forces began to execute more than 7,000 unarmed Muslim men and boys.

The killings in July 1995 were the worst massacre of the three-and-a-half-year war in Bosnia, occurring after Bosnian Serb forces overran a United Nations safe haven in eastern Bosnia, guarded by lightly armed Dutch peacekeepers.

Passages in the document refer to the police forces "taking part in combat operations" and spell out that the forces include "Serbian MUP," the secret police controlled by the Serbian Ministry of the Interior. The document was briefly referred to in court last week, but its text was first published today by the Institute for War and Peace Reporting.

The Serb leadership and Mr. Milosevic have insisted that they bore no responsibility for Bosnian atrocities because fighting was done by Bosnian Serbs, operating independently from Belgrade. Insiders say that Mr. Milosevic always avoided issuing written orders, and no paper trail appeared to link him to the atrocities inflicted on civilians during the 1992-95 Bosnian war.

But the military order, if given due weight by the court, not only puts Serbian special police at the massacre site but also provides a direct link to Mr. Milosevic, who as president of Serbia at the time was formally in charge of all Serb civilian police. It is not clear, however, whether he actually knew that a group of his police had been sent to the Srebrenica area at that time.

Several witnesses at the Milosevic trial testified earlier this year that Serb forces operated in eastern Bosnia in the early 1990's, when tens of thousands of Muslim civilians were driven from their homes to create an ethnically pure region for Serbs.

But this appears to be the first known order relating to Srebrenica that confirms the presence of Serb police. "For the moment, this is the first such document relating to the July 1995 massacre," an official in the prosecutor's office said. "There will be more evidence when we focus on Srebrenica."

The order, dated July 10, 1995, ordered four police units, including the "Serbian MUP," to form "an independent" detachment and move from their base near Sarajevo to Srebrenica "to crush the enemy offensive."

The units were ordered to go first to Bratunac, a village near Srebrenica, on July 11, which was the day that Bosnian Serb troops overran the enclave, which sheltered tens of thousands of Muslims and was protected by about 300 United Nations peacekeepers.

The massacres of civilians did not begin until the next day. Between July 12 and 17 more than 7,000 unarmed Muslim men and boys were executed by forces under Bosnian Serb control. Many were transported en masse to sites near Srebrenica and then killed; others died when they tried to escape after being captured.

Gen. Ratko Mladic, the officer in charge of the assault on Srebrenica, has been charged with genocide in connection with the killings and the Bosnian Serb siege of Sarajevo but remains at large.

Witnesses and even participants in the massacres have told the tribunal about the roles played by army, police and paramilitary fighters in the blood bath. But even during the trial of Gen. Radislav Krstic, one of the commanders at Srebrenica, who was sentenced to 46 years in prison for genocide, prosecutors had no documents linking the atrocity to Belgrade. They did have radio intercepts between Bosnian Serb military leaders, discussing the killings.

Mr. Milosevic has maintained that far from giving orders, he heard of the killings only after the fact. He was supported by Zoran Lilic, president of Yugoslavia between 1993 and 1997, who testified for three days this week. Mr. Lilic told the court that while it was Mr. Milosevic who held the true power, he had "nothing to do with what happened in Srebrenica." He said that Mr. Milosevic was "angry and shaken" when he found out, and told him that he could not believe "these crazy Serbs from Pale" did this. Pale was the seat of the Bosnian Serb government during the war.

Even if Mr. Milosevic knew nothing about a plan to massacre civilians, lawyers said he could still be held accountable because he failed to punish the perpetrators.