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Bosnian Serb Pleads Guilty to War Crimes

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

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THE HAGUE, Netherlands (AP) -- A Bosnian Serb captain set to go on trial at a U.N. tribunal this week for the 1995 massacre of thousands of Muslims pleaded guilty to war crimes Tuesday and agreed to testify against three other defendants in the case.

In exchange, prosecutors dropped the most serious charge of genocide against Momir Nikolic, a member of the Bratunac Brigade that participated in the executions of more than 7,000 Muslim men and boys in the Bosnian enclave of Srebrenica at the end of the 1992-1995 Bosnian war.

Nikolic, a former school teacher, was arrested in April 2002 and brought to The Hague. He pleaded innocent to genocide and extermination as the officer in charge of Muslim prisoners during the weeklong bloodbath in which captives were executed while blindfolded or with their hands tied behind their backs.

The indictment said Nikolic was nearby when 80-100 prisoners were decapitated and their headless corpses loaded onto trucks on July 12, 1995.

According to the prosecution document detailing the deal with Nikolic, he acknowledged "the murder of over 7,000 boys and men between 16-60," as well as cruel treatment, destroying Muslim property in and around Srebrenica, and other charges.

Three other men also are named in Nikolic's indictment: Vidoje Blagojevic, Dragan Obrenovic and Dragan Jokic. Negotiations over the Nikolic deal delayed their trial until May 14.

The agreement recommended that he be sentenced to 20 years in prison, while his defense attorneys pressed for 10 years. His sentence will be decided after the other trials end.

Nikolic "agrees to testify against the co-accused and in any other trials hearing or other proceedings before the tribunal," the agreement said.

The war crimes tribunal for Yugoslavia has convicted only one person, Bosnian Serb general Radislav Krstic, of genocide. He was sentenced in August 2001 to 46 years for crimes at Srebrenica.

Two leading fugitives, wartime military commander Ratko Mladic and former Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic, remain at large.

Those two are named as conspirators in an indictment released Tuesday for the former head of the Serbian state security force and his top aide.

Former state security chief Jovica Stanisic and his deputy Franko Simatovic allegedly set up paramilitary units that committed mass murders in Bosnia and Croatia in the early 1990s, according to the indictment released Tuesday.

Prosecutors allege they sought to purge non-Serbs from key areas of the former Yugoslavia to create a larger Serb-dominated state. Stanisic was a close ally of former Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic, who also is being tried at the Hague.

The pair were arrested in Serbia in connection with the March assassination of Serbian Prime Minister Zoran Djindjic, and now await transfer from a Belgrade jail to the U.N. detention unit in The Hague.

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