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Verdict on atrocity crimes in the former Yugoslavia major step to addressing impunity – UN Human Rights Chief

31 May 2023

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GENEVA (31 May 2023) - UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk on Wednesday welcomed the final verdict of the UN's International Residual Mechanism for the Criminal Tribunals concerning atrocity crimes committed in the former Yugoslavia, describing the outcome as a major step to establishing the truth and addressing impunity.

The Mechanism in 2018 took over the responsibilities of the UN's International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY). It issued today its final verdict on appeal* in the case of *Stanišić and Simatović*, concerning two former senior Serbian security officials.

"The extraordinary work and legacy of the Mechanism and of the International Criminal Tribunal before it have not only contributed to establishing truth, justice and accountability over the years but have also powerfully advanced international criminal justice standards globally," Türk said.

The High Commissioner highlighted the courage, resilience and perseverance of survivors and families who, despite appalling trauma, never stopped seeking truth and justice.

"I want to praise, strongly, the survivors and their families, whose suffering is unimaginable but who persisted in demanding their rights," he said.

The UN Human Rights Chief stressed that many survivors and their families are still awaiting truth, justice and reparations. He stressed that much work remains to be done by domestic tribunals and called for stronger regional cooperation.

Many victims continue to face threats, intimidation, hate speech and revisionist rhetoric, including rejection of the tribunals' decisions; denials that crimes were committed; justification of atrocities; and the glorification of war criminals. Türk said that these issues continued to be serious obstacles to justice, reparation and memorialization.



return. I urge the authorities, media outlets and people in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, Serbia, North Macedonia and Kosovo^[1] to step up efforts to advance truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence. Revisionist narratives, genocide denial, divisive rhetoric and hate speech, from any quarter, are unacceptable.”

“Any actions that exacerbate tensions between and among communities must be condemned – immediately.”

ENDS

** The Appeals Chamber of the Mechanism rejected Stanišić and Simatović’s appeals, confirming convictions for aiding and abetting murder as a violation of the laws or customs of war, as well as murder, deportation, inhumane acts (forcible transfer) and persecution as crimes against humanity committed in 1992 in Bosanski Šamac, Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Appeals Chamber also went to hold both men liable as members of a joint criminal enterprise for crimes committed by various Serb forces in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1992 in Bijeljina, Zvornik, Bosanski Šamac, Doboј, and Sanski Most; for crimes committed in 1995 in Trnovo and Sanski Most; as well as for a further murder in 1992 in Daljska Planina, Croatia. The Appeals Chamber Court increased sentences imposed on both individuals from 12 years to 15 years of imprisonment.*

[1] All references to Kosovo should be understood to be in the context of UN Security Council resolution 1244 (1999)

For more information and media requests, please contact:

In Geneva

Ravina Shamdasani - + 41 22 917 9169 /



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