

4 Bosnian Serbs sentenced for Srebrenica killings

AP By SABINA NIKSIC | Associated Press

SARAJEVO, Bosnia-Herzegovina (AP) — Bosnia's war crimes court convicted four former Bosnian Serb soldiers on Friday of participating in the execution of hundreds of Srebrenica Muslims during the country's 1992-95 conflict and sentenced them to a total of 142 years in prison.

About 800 captured Muslim Bosniaks were shot and killed at Branjevo military farm, near Srebrenica.

It was one of several sites where more than 8,000 such victims were killed in what became known as the 1995 Srebrenica massacre and a major development in the Bosnia war. U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan called the mass murders the worst crime on European soil since the Second World War.

The four former members of the Bosnian Serb Army's elite 10th Sabotage Detachment were convicted on Friday of crimes against humanity, but were acquitted on genocide charges when the court found it had not been proven they had "genocidal intent." The court sentenced Franc Kos and Zoran Goronja to 40 years in jail, Stanko Kojic to 43, and Vlastimir Golijan to 19 .

But the sentences are the harshest given so far by Bosnia's war crimes court for the July 1995 massacre.

Other Bosnian Serb soldiers have been convicted of taking part in the Srebrenica massacre by Bosnia's court and by the U.N. war crimes tribunal for former Yugoslavia in The Hague, and several other suspects remain at large.

Judge Mira Smajlovic said Friday that the killings at Branjevo farm took five hours, during which time the soldiers involved found time for a lunch break.

"Their attitude toward the killings can be best understood when one knows they even took a break to have lunch and drink beer in the meadow full of corpses, while other prisoners looked on from the buses," waiting for their turn to be murdered, Smajlovic said while reading the verdict.

The judge said the four soldiers carried out the crime in "an organized and systematic" manner. They led small groups of prisoners — some of them blindfolded and with their hands tied — from buses that drove them to the killing site, ordered them to line up in the meadow with their backs toward the killing squad, then opened fire.

Kos and Kojic also shot wounded prisoners in the head using pistols to "make sure no one will survive," the judge said.

More than 8,000 Bosniak men and boys from Srebrenica were killed in just a few days after Srebrenica — a U.N. declared "safe area" — was overrun by Bosnian Serb forces in July 1995.

The mass killings in Srebrenica were the only episode of Bosnia's 1992-95 war labeled an act of genocide by the International Court of Justice and the special U.N. War Crimes Tribunal for former Yugoslavia.