

## THE HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN THE FORMER YUGOSLAVIA

### ISSUE

The human rights situation throughout most of the former Yugoslavia remains a matter of grave concern for Canada. The continuing armed conflict in the region, fuelled by ethnic intolerance and long-standing rivalries, has resulted in the violation of almost every norm of international humanitarian law.

Until the fighting stops, and security and stability are restored, human rights abuses will likely continue. Ethnic prejudice and rivalries may cause the conflict to spread to parts of the former Yugoslavia not yet affected by the fighting, or even to other Balkan states.

### BACKGROUND

Minority rights abuse has been widespread and conducted by all parties since the beginning of the crisis in the former Yugoslavia. As the federal republic disintegrated, the Serbs sought to ensure their "nation" would remain within one country. In so doing, the Serbs tried to extend their control over regions with sizeable minorities, and over new states led by non-Serbs. Other groups such as the Croats and Muslims sought to consolidate their position in the new states by suppressing the minority rights of others, including Serbs.

The most blatant and shocking abuses of human rights in the former Yugoslavia have taken place through the practice of "ethnic cleansing". Murder, rape, torture and other forms of intimidation are used to drive people of one ethnic group from their homes and towns in areas claimed by another ethnic group. This practice has had a devastating impact in a region where roots run deep and where there is virtually no social mobility.

The first widespread use of ethnic cleansing occurred in Croatia where both Serbs and Croats were forced to move from areas where they were in the minority to other locations where they formed the majority. The United Nations has some 15,000 peace-keepers deployed in UN Protected Areas (UNPAs) to establish basic law and order, and to reassure the civilian population in those areas. Fighting between Croat and Serb forces has more or less halted for the past three years and an economic agreement signed by both sides in December incorporates confidence-building measures.

In Bosnia-Herzegovina, ethnic cleansing is still widespread and systematic. More than 100,000 people have been killed, several hundred thousand more injured, and close to three million have been displaced or forced to seek refuge in neighbouring countries. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees, along with the International Committee of the Red Cross and other humanitarian agencies, has been providing emergency relief supplies to many who have no other means of sustenance or shelter.

The United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) has some 25,000 troops deployed in Bosnia-Herzegovina to provide military escorts to international relief convoys, to keep open Sarajevo airport for the airlift of relief supplies, and to create six "safe areas" for the