

HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN THE FORMER YUGOSLAVIA

ISSUE

Following the disintegration of the former Yugoslavia, the human rights situation throughout most of its territory continues to be a matter of grave concern for the Canadian government. Exacerbated by ethnic hatred and traditional rivalries of many centuries standing, the ongoing civil war in this region has seen the violation of almost every norm that is included under the aegis of international humanitarian law.

Unless the fighting can be stopped and security and stability restored, the abuses will continue. There is great fear that, in areas as yet untouched, the volatility of inter-ethnic feelings will lead in the first instance to a spread of the civil war and its atrocities and ultimately across national borders to a general Balkan war.

BACKGROUND

From its beginning the crisis in the former Yugoslavia has been marked by the abuse of minority rights. The Serbs have sought to ensure that their "nation" could be kept within one country and in so doing to extend their sway over regions in which other groups have lived for centuries as a resident minority. In reaction, other groups like the Croats and the Muslims, have also sought to suppress the rights of minorities.

These activities led to the driving of persons from their homes and villages, now commonly known as "ethnic cleansing". They have horrified observers with their brutality and callous disregard for human life and rights. As a result large parts of Croatia have been carved out by the Serbs and their Croatian population forced out. These areas have had to be placed under UN control in order to establish some semblance of law and order and to safeguard the remaining Croats.

Within Serbia proper the Hungarians of Vojvodina, the Muslims of the Sandzak, and the Albanians of Kosovo all feel themselves to be at risk. The CSCE has established Long-term Missions in each of these areas, focused upon preventive diplomacy and/or conflict prevention.

In Bosnia-Herzegovina the fighting has raged and literally millions have fled either voluntarily or as victims of "ethnic cleansing". Basic necessities of life have become scarce and international aid agencies led by the UNHCR and the ICRC have become involved in the supply and distribution of relief materiel. The UN, recognizing the need, arranged for military protection for the relief effort through the activities of UNPROFOR II.

In any war there are war crimes, but this is made worse in Bosnia-Herzegovina by the extent of the atrocities and the hatred of which they give evidence. The United Nations