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THE HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN THE FORMER YUGOSLAVIA

ISSUE

The human rights situation in the former Yugoslavia remains a matter of serious concern. The 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 and basic human rights standards.

In the new environment, initiated with the signing of the Dayton peace agreement for Bosnia and Herzegovina, Canada and the international community shall continue to pursue the promotion and monitoring of respect for human rights, and prosecution of the perpetrators of war crimes.

BACKGROUND

Since the beginning of the conflict in the former Yugoslavia, the parties have committed massive and systematic human rights abuses, notably through the practice of "ethnic cleansing". Murder, rape, torture and other forms of intimidation have been used to drive people of one ethnic group from their homes in areas claimed by another ethnic group. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, ethnic cleansing was widespread.

More than 100,000 people have been killed since the beginning of the conflict, several hundred thousand more injured, and close to three million displaced or forced to seek refuge in neighbouring countries. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), along with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and other humanitarian agencies, has provided emergency relief supplies to many who have no other means of sustenance or shelter.

This past year witnessed some of the worst atrocities of the conflict. In July and August 1995, Bosnian Serb forces overran the UN-designated "safe areas" of Srebrenica and Zepa, leading to the displacement of some 60,000 people, and the murder and rape of thousands more. The ICRC estimates that over 3,000 men and boys, held by Bosnian Serb forces, remain missing. Despite assurances of cooperation, the Bosnian Serbs continue to block international access to sites of suspected mass graves and detention centres.

In May and August 1995, the Croatian Army used military force to regain control of Western Slavonia and the Krajina. As a result of the fighting, some 250,000 civilians fled the areas. The UN Secretary-General reported the killings of several hundred civilians, systematic and widespread looting and arson, and other forms of destruction of property.

In Serbia, minority groups, such as the Hungarians and Croats of Vojvodina, and the Muslims of the Sandzak region, feel at risk from the Serbian majority, as do ethnic Albanians, who constitute the majority in Kosovo. The human rights situation in these areas