
BOSNIA'S OMARSKA CAMP SECURITY CHIEF DUE FOR RELEASE

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Zeljko Mejakic, who controlled security at the Bosnian Serbs notorious Omarska detention camp in the Prijedor area in 1992, will be given a conditional release on January 25, the state court confirmed to BIRN.

Mejakic is currently serving a 21-year sentence for crimes committed at the Omarska camp, including murders, unlawful detention, torture, sexual violence, persecution and other inhumane acts.

The Bosnian Justice Ministry decided to give him a conditional release in late January because he will have served two-thirds of his sentence, the state court said.

According to the second-instance verdict convicting Mejakic, the time he spent in custody from July 2003 onwards, when he was arrested in Serbia, was counted towards his sentence.

Mejakic was sent from Serbia to The Hague Tribunal in July 2003, then his case was transferred from The Hague to Bosnia and Herzegovina in May 2006. His final verdict was handed down by the Bosnian state court in May 2008.

Around 6,000 Bosniak and Croat men and women were detained at Omarska and some 700 of them were killed in the three months during which the camp operated at the beginning of the Bosnian war in 1992.

It was finally closed on August 21, 1992, when the last group of detainees was transferred to Trnopolje detention camp.

Convicted alongside Mejakic were Momcilo Gruban, leader of one of the three guard shifts at the Omarska camp, and Dusko Knezevic, who had no official function at Omarska and another Bosnian Serb detention camp in the Prijedor area, Keraterm. All three men were found to have acted as part of a joint criminal enterprise.

Gruban was sentenced to seven years in prison and Knezevic to 31 years.

Edin Ramulic of the Foundation for Building the Culture of Memory from Prijedor said that Mejakic's conditional release did not come as a surprise.

The institution of long-term imprisonment means absolutely nothing, unfortunately, Ramulic told BIRN.

Mathematically, all of them have the right to be released early. That is surely a negative message in terms of prevention. The sentences were short anyway and they will be shortened even more. And all this only relates to a small group of people who will actually be brought to justice [for wartime crimes], he added.

Miodrag Stojanovic, a lawyer who has represented war crimes defendants in The Hague, pointed out that if had Mejakic been sentenced by the UN court, he would have already been released according to the tribunals rules.

We will fight for the conditional release of defendants after they have served two-thirds of their sentences, respecting The Hagues standards, Stojanovic told BIRN.

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