Wanted men: three fugitives remain

8 August 2008 | The Hague

*With the recent arrest of Radovan Karadžić, only three men charged with grave crimes committed in the former Yugoslavia remain at large.*

Considered by some as the ‘world’s most wanted man’, Radovan Karadžić was finally captured on 21 July 2008 in Serbia. The arrest was a major milestone for the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY). The Tribunal—whose mandate is officially due to end in 2010—now has the chance to put into practice the lessons learned from the ill-fated Milošević trial to successfully try Karadžić – the former Bosnian Serb leader.

However, three fugitives still remain at large.

Bosnian Serb commander Ratko Mladić and Goran Hadžić, the former President of the self-proclaimed Republic of Serbian Krajina, have so far evaded arrest. A third fugitive, Radovan Stanković, escaped from prison in May 2007.

**Ratko Mladić**

Ratko Mladić was originally indicted with Radovan Karadžić. Mladić has been charged with genocide and complicity in genocide as well as war crimes and crimes against humanity, including extermination and murder, deportation, inhumane acts and the taking of hostages. The most notorious of Mladić’s alleged crimes took place in Srebrenica in July 1995; up to 8,000 Bosnian Muslim men were captured and executed by Bosnian Serb forces under Mladić’s command.

Like Karadžić, Ratko Mladić was originally indicted on 24 July 1995, although the charges concerning his role in the Srebrenica massacre were only confirmed in November 1995.
After the end of the Bosnian war, Mladić moved to Belgrade, where he was protected by President Slobodan Milošević. During this time, Mladić was frequently seen in public (albeit surrounded by bodyguards) attending football games and eating in expensive restaurants.

Investigators say they believe that after Milošević was arrested in 2001 and transferred to The Hague, Mladić sought refuge in his wartime underground military bunker in Han Pišesak, the Tito-era complex in eastern Bosnia built to house Communist leaders in the event of war. NATO organised several operations in the area to track Mladić down, but these operations were ultimately unsuccessful.

In early 2006, a Serbian military intelligence report, leaked to the media, stated that until June 2002 Mladić had been hiding in army facilities in Republika Srpska (one of the two political entities within Bosnia and Herzegovina) and in Serbia – protected by a network of 50 intelligence and army officials.

On 1 June 2002, Serbia passed a new law enhancing its cooperation with the ICTY. No confirmed sightings of Ratko Mladić have been reported since that date. With Karadžić’s capture, Mladić became the most sought-after remaining fugitive.

**Goran Hadžić**

Goran Hadžić held the position of President of the Republic of Serbian Krajina from 1992 until 1993. The Republic of Serbian Krajina was comprised of territory seized from Croatia by Serbs in a rebellion against Croatia’s declaration of independence. Hadžić has been indicted for crimes against humanity and violations of the laws or customs of war stemming from his alleged involvement in the forcible removal and murder of thousands of Croatian civilians and other non-Serbs between 1991 and 1993.

Hadžić’s indictment includes the 1991 massacre of some 260 civilians taken from the hospital in Vukovar – a city in the far east of Croatia – in one of the first atrocities of the war. The victims of the massacre were removed from Vukovar Hospital in the aftermath of the Serb takeover of the city and transported to a farm building in nearby Ovčara. That night, 20 November 1991, the captives were shot and killed. Their bodies were buried in a mass grave.

As President of the so-called “Serbian Autonomous District” in Croatia at the time, Hadžić is alleged to have been individually criminally responsible for planning and instigating the Vukovar atrocities—in concert with others—as part of a joint criminal enterprise.
On 27 September 2007, the ICTY convicted two former Yugoslav People’s Army (JNA) officers for their role in the brutal siege of Vukovar (although the two were given relatively short prison sentences). The Judgement, which included the acquittal of a third individual, caused outrage in Croatia. Victims of the massacre are still seeking justice for the atrocities committed that day.

Hadžić disappeared from his home in Serbia shortly after his indictment was made public in July 2004.

**Radovan Stanković**

Radovan Stanković was a member of the Foča tactical brigade in the south-east of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). Between August and October 1992, Stanković participated in the widespread and systematic attack by the Army of the Republika Srpska against the non-Serb civilian population of the Foča municipality. During this period, Stanković and others established a detention centre for women, most of them underage, in “Karamanova kuća” (Karaman’s House) – known by soldiers as “the brothel”.

Stanković was convicted of heinous crimes committed in the notorious Foča “rape camps” in 1992. In “Karaman’s House”, nine Muslim girls and women were enslaved by Stanković and his co-accused; two of them were raped—on an ongoing basis—by him and others from 3 August 1992 until 10 October 1992. The youngest victim was 12 years old.

On 28 March 2007, the Appellate Panel of the Court of BiH increased Stanković’s sentence from 16 to 20 years’ imprisonment. The case had been referred to the court in Sarajevo by the ICTY under the Tribunal’s completion strategy.

Remarkably, despite being accompanied by nine guards, Stanković escaped from the prison authorities on 25 May 2007 – apparently feigning the need for dental treatment. He had been transferred to serve his sentence in Foča, the same town where he had earlier carried out his crimes.

After the escape, the Prime Minister of Republika Srpska, Milorad Dodik, noted that “it was not appropriate for the Court of BiH to send Stanković to Foča to serve his sentence because he was born there and had school mates and friends [in Foča].”

The Prime Minister promised that “almost all staff” would be replaced at the prison for allowing the audacious escape to take place. However, although five of the guards were arrested on 1 June 2007, on 1 August 2008 the District Court of Trebinje (BiH) ruled that they be allowed to return to work at the prison.
More than a year after the escape, ICTY President Fausto Pocar expressed his frustration at the continued failure to apprehend the fugitive. In his speech to the UN Security Council on 4 June 2008, Pocar declared: “This is not only a stain on the reputation of the authorities of the Republika Srpska responsible; it also shows the scale of the problems we [the Tribunal] are facing. I continue to be gravely concerned about the lack of progress made by the relevant authorities in apprehending Stanković and in prosecuting those who assisted his escape at all levels.”

Despite the discovery of his escape vehicle near the border with Montenegro and an Interpol warrant out for his arrest, Stanković’s whereabouts are unknown to this day.