

# War crimes trial

*The Serb wartime leader accused of genocide calls the Serbian cause 'just and holy' in court.*

Serb wartime leader Radovan Karadzic told the court that the Serb cause in the Bosnian war was "just and holy" at the opening of his trial for war crimes on Monday. Karadzic suspended his previous boycott of the hearings to present his defense before the court in The Hague.

Karadzic accused the United Nations prosecutors of fabricating the evidence used to charge him. He told judges he would provide evidence that "there was never a plan nor an idea to expel Muslims from the Republika Srpska," the Serb Republic within Bosnia-Herzegovina which he headed during the 1990s.

## **Defense not convincing**

Karadzic, who represented himself in court, spent most of his three-hour testimonial accusing the then Muslim leadership of wanting to establish an Islamic state in the Balkans.

Experts say Karadzic has very little chance of succeeding, given this excessively political defense.

"The laws on war are very precise," Mark Ellis, executive director of The International Bar Association, which represents 198 bar associations and about 40,000 lawyers worldwide, told Deutsche Welle.

"For Karadzic to argue that he was responding to an external, aggressive force, would never justify acts of genocide or war crimes. He has no legal basis," Ellis explains.

Although it will not be easy for the prosecution to prove he was directly or indirectly involved in genocide and crimes against humanity, Ellis believes the evidence against him is "exceedingly strong" and that Karadzic "faces an uphill battle."

## **Bosnia more divided than ever**

The two entities that make up Bosnia Herzegovina remain bitterly divided, with Serbs in the Republika Srpska often sympathetic to Karadzic, while many Muslims and Croats in the Federation of Bosnia Herzegovina are disillusioned with international efforts to hold Karadzic and others to account.

"Up in Banja Luka and in the Serb Republic, where the majority are ethnic Serbs, they still see Karadzic as a war hero," Deutsche Welle's correspondent Mark Lowen explains.

"They see him as a defender of the Serb nation and they refuse to accept the way he is portrayed in Sarajevo and the rest of the country," he says.

Lowen has also been gauging the mood in Sarajevo, the capital of the Federation of Bosnia Herzegovina, where the largest part of the population is Muslim.



Many fear Karadzic will employ delay tactics similar to former Serb leader Milosevic  
Image: AP

"People are keen for justice to be done. They tell me the Milosevic trial made them lose confidence in [the court] in The Hague; they do not feel any satisfaction here in Sarajevo; they think the whole process is a bit of a farce," Lowen says.

Slobodan Milosevic, the former Serbian leader, died in prison in 2006 in the course of a trial which had already lasted four years, during which Milosevic repeatedly stalled for time as part of his strategy.

### **Charges of ethnic cleansing**

Karadzic is accused of having masterminded a campaign of ethnic cleansing during the Bosnian war, and must answer to 11 counts of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity committed during the 1992-95 war. The genocide killed an estimated 100,000 people and displaced 2.2 million.

During his opening comments, the former Serbian leader read from a prepared statement and often referred to himself in the third person as "Karadzic." He also produced video footage claiming that a marketplace in Sarajevo was actually deserted when it was allegedly shelled by Bosnian forces in an attack that killed 68 people and wounded nearly 150.

The trial at the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia began in October last year but was delayed after Karadzic, 64, boycotted the trial opening, claiming he needed more time to prepare his defense.

A psychiatrist before he became president of the self-proclaimed Republika Srpska, Karadzic stepped down in 1996. He spent the next 13 years on the run before he was arrested on a bus in Belgrade.

If convicted, Karadzic could face life in prison.

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