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## 26 Bosnian Serbs arrested in U.S.

- 16 refugees accused of hiding membership in brutal military
- Remainder face administrative immigration violations
- Raids follow U.N. war-crimes trial in The Hague, Netherlands
- Units of Bosnian Serb army accused of atrocities in Srebrenica

From Terry Frieden  
CNN

**WASHINGTON (CNN)** -- Twenty-six Bosnian Serb refugees are in custody after a series of raids around the United States targeting people who served in Bosnian Serb military units that attacked Muslims. Officials say three others remain at large.

Sixteen of the 29 face criminal charges for concealing their military service when they applied for refugee status in the United States.

A court document says one of them, Nedjo Ikonic, 40, of Greenfield, Wisconsin, "was a commander of a police company that cooperated with and was subordinated to the Army of the Serbian Republic during the July 1995 massacre in Srebrenica."

Units of the Bosnian Serb army are accused of torturing and executing at least 7,000 Muslims in Srebrenica, a United Nations-designated "safe area."

The 16 were indicted on charges of immigration fraud or lying about their Bosnian Serb military background on their immigration applications. They face five to 10 years in prison if convicted.

Thirteen others detained only on administrative immigration violations face deportation.

The arrests by Immigration and Customs Service agents occurred over several days in Florida, Wisconsin, Colorado, Michigan, North Carolina and Ohio, according to Justice Department officials familiar with the operations.

"These cases demonstrate our resolve to identify and prosecute those who enter this country under false pretenses, especially those who hide their military past," said Deputy Attorney General Paul McNulty.

The U.S. investigation followed a U.N. war crimes tribunal in The Hague, Netherlands.

One official said some Bosnian Serbs fled the United States earlier this month after they were initially interviewed by immigration agents.

The largest number of arrests occurred Monday in Tampa, Florida, where eight suspects were apprehended. Several of them were arraigned in U.S. District Court there and pleaded not guilty.

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## 15 Serbs face questions about past

**Accused of lying on Immigration forms, they are asked about the '90s war.**

LANE DEGREGORY

Published December 13, 2006

ST. PETERSBURG - The Immigration officers came before 5 a.m. Monday, pounding on the doors of 15 St. Petersburg homes.

Slavko Krmanovic, 17, woke to flashlights on his porch, eight agents pointing guns at his house. They wanted his dad. He told them his dad was driving his mom to work. So the agents waited until Strahinja Krmanovic came home.

"As soon as he got out of the car, they handcuffed him behind his back and arrested him," Slavko said. "They kept calling him 'the suspect.' What did he do?"

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All of the immigrants arrested are men between age 40 and 60. Most are husbands and fathers who work two jobs to pay mortgages. They all belong to St. Sava Serbian Orthodox Church. They were part of a wave of about 3,000 Serbs who came to St. Petersburg as refugees in the early 1990s, during the war that dissected Yugoslavia.

The 15 men are suspected of lying on their Immigration applications, of falsifying their permanent resident papers. Officials say they also could be connected to, or know something about, war crimes that happened 11 years ago.

Agents took the men's passports and green cards. Then they took them to jail.

Customs agents asked the men whether they had served in the Serbian army.

And where they were stationed in July 1995.

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The arrests were the most recent in a series of Serbian roundups across the country. In August 2004, immigration officials in Boston jailed a Serb they said had committed war crimes. In March 2006, immigration officials in Phoenix arrested 24 Serbs suspected of atrocities.

Those men allegedly took part in a July 1995 massacre at a farm outside Srebrenica, where a reported 1,200 Muslims were gunned down.

The St. Petersburg men might have information about the massacre, said prosecutor Donald Hansen from the U.S.

Attorney's Office.

"Through work at the Hague, we're still finding out who was in the units that did the massacres," Hansen said.

The 15 men were charged with denying that they had been in the military. They said relief workers told them if they admitted to being soldiers, they wouldn't be allowed to emigrate to the United States.

During that war, every man age 17 or older had to serve, said Father Stephan Zaremba, priest at the Serbian church. "Those who refused were sent to concentration camps or shot," he said. "What would you do?"

By Tuesday morning, 10 of the St. Petersburg Serbs had been questioned and released. The remaining five were scheduled to appear in federal court at 2 p.m. Only four were there when Judge Thomas McCoun III called the court to order.

They shuffled in slowly, heavy chains dragging between their ankles, orange jumpsuits sagging across their slumped shoulders.

The bailiff gave each man headphones, and a translator stood by a microphone. The bailiff explained that the fifth man, Ostoja Saric, wasn't there because "he wasn't on the list."

The judge asked each man's wife to take the stand. None of them spoke English. Sekula Bilic's case was called first.

He's 37, a construction worker, the youngest of the four men. When his wife walked toward the judge shaking, he smashed his fist into his dark eyes.

They had been married 15 years and lived in Florida for six. They had a \$69,500 mortgage on a little house on Seventh Street in St. Petersburg. And they had three children, ages 13, 10 and 3.

The charge of falsifying immigration papers carries a maximum sentence of 10 years, the prosecutor said. If the men also were charged with war crimes, they could be sent to jail or back to Bosnia.

The judge told each man to hire an attorney. In two weeks, he said, they would have to come back to court for their hearings. Until then, the men would have to stay in jail, unless their wives were willing to put up \$60,000 bonds.

One by one, the women all signed over their homes: Strahinja Krmanicvoc, whose husband is a computer tech, whose two youngest sons were home when the agents came. Ljilja Kordic, whose husband works in manufacturing, who has a son and daughter. Jadranko D'Gastic is divorced, but his live-in girlfriend took legal responsibility for making sure he didn't skip town.

...

By late Tuesday, the four men were out of jail. Their families didn't ask them about the war, or what had happened so long ago. Most of them never had.

They didn't want to know. They had lost everything in the war: family, homes, friends. They had wallowed in refugee camps, fought for permits to get out, come to Florida with just their clothes and determination. For more than a decade, they had worked to buy homes and businesses, send their kids to college. Now everything was crashing down. The

past they thought they had escaped still haunted them.

"In the old Yugoslavia, 90 percent of us were in the war, and 90 percent of us didn't want to be," said Stadjana Bilic, her eyes red and swollen. "Just because they had to be in the army doesn't mean they were part of a massacre."

Scott Raspopovich, who is president of St. Sava Serbian church, doesn't understand why only Serbs are being hauled in for questioning, when Croatians and Muslims also killed people in the war. "If you define war crimes as shooting the enemy, yes, these men probably all did. But what choice did they have?" he said.

"Were they involved in those massacres? Not that I know of. If they were, they sure never told anyone."

Times news researcher Caryn Baird contributed to this report.

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## U.S. alleges link to Bosnian massacre

### Greenfield man held on immigration fraud charge

By GINA BARTON  
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Posted: Dec. 12, 2006

A Serbian immigrant who has been living in Greenfield since 2004 has been charged with immigration fraud after his name surfaced in connection with the massacre of some 7,500 Muslim men and boys in the Balkan city of Srebrenica in 1995.

Nedjo Ikonic, 40, has not been charged with war crimes. But his name is listed on documents used by prosecutors at the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia in The Hague, according to a criminal complaint filed in federal court in Milwaukee. He is charged with lying about the extent of his military service when he entered the United States as a refugee.

Ikonic was in federal custody Tuesday. A bail hearing was scheduled for this afternoon. Ikonic's wife, Borislava, said Tuesday that she didn't understand why half a dozen federal agents came into her family's home with guns drawn and handcuffed her husband in front of their two daughters over a paperwork problem.

"We are not criminals, drug dealers, pedophiles, psychos or criminals, we're just one normal family," she said. "We don't have guns. We're just a regular family. We think about our kids, we work hard, we want to buy a house."

Nikola Kostich, attorney for Ikonic, said his client is being lumped in with thousands of others who were affiliated with the Bosnian Serb army but weren't actively involved in war crimes.

"The problem is that they've painted something like 19,000 people as having something to do with this business. It's impossible for 19,000 men to be personally involved," he said.

In 1993, the United Nations Security Council designated Srebrenica as a "safe haven" for Bosnian Muslim civilians as the Bosnian Serb military waged an ethnic cleansing campaign against them, according to the tribunal. Two years later, in the summer of 1995, a detachment of the Bosnian Serb army known as the Drina Corps overpowered the 150 Dutch U.N. peacekeepers there.

Muslim men were separated from women and children and killed in what has been called the worst case of genocide in Europe since World War II.

According to an affidavit filed with the complaint against Ikonic, three witnesses told investigators at the tribunal that he was the commander of a police company that cooperated with the army "to evacuate and escort the buses containing the Muslims who were ultimately taken to other locations and exiled (in the case of women, children and the infirm) or executed (in the case of Muslim men)."

The company stood ready to defend against counterattacks by Muslim troops, according to the affidavit.

"After the evacuations, the company under Ikonic's command conducted ground sweeps of the roads and forests . . . in cooperation with the Serbian Army," the affidavit says.

Ikonic was granted refugee status in the United States in 2002. On the immigration form, he wrote only that he had performed "compulsory (military) service for the former Yugoslavia from 1986 to 1987," attaining the rank of private, according to the affidavit. The complaint suggests that Ikonic's police company essentially became part of the army, and that he should have divulged his police work on his request for asylum.

Even if the witnesses are incorrect about Ikonic's command, lying on the form is a crime, said Carl Rusnok, spokesman for the U.S. Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

"ICE will not tolerate people who try to use the U.S. as a haven from justice in their original countries of origin," he said. "It's illegal to fraudulently misrepresent yourself (when applying for refugee status), and by doing so it may be grounds for deportation."

In addition to deportation, Ikonic faces a maximum penalty of five years in prison if convicted.

Borislava Ikonic said that she, her husband and their two daughters, now 9 and 13, came to the United States about four and a half years ago after their home in Bosnia was destroyed in the war. They lived in Minneapolis before coming to the Milwaukee area. She is a bookkeeper and her husband is a long-haul truck driver, she said.

"I don't want you to present my husband as a bad person because he is not," she said. "My husband and I, we don't have any criminal record back home or here. . . . We work very hard, respect all (the) community here. We are just a family who likes to live in peace."

Kostich, the defense attorney, said he has received numerous calls from outraged members of the Serbian community.

One of them is Minela Hamblin, a Serbian immigrant who attends St. Sava Serbian Orthodox Church with the Ikonic family. Hamblin, of Oak Creek, is organizing an effort to help the family by raising money, writing letters and providing support.

"Here we are 11 years after the war has ended, still having to deal with it, when all these years we've been trying to forget about it and move on and lead normal lives," she said. "And here is the U.S. giving us a chance to try and do that, and overnight everything changes. It's a total discrimination as far as I'm concerned."

Kostich, who has defended about a dozen people before the international war crimes tribunal, said he is

aware of about 45 immigration cases similar to Ikonic's in cities around the country, including Phoenix, Salt Lake City and Tampa, Fla. Kostich said he has information that federal authorities are looking at some 600 people.

"All of these folks that I know of . . . were not involved (in the massacre). Nobody is charged with executing anybody, of transporting anybody to be executed . . . or of being there when it happened," he said. "It's a way of punishing anyone who was part of the Drina Corps. That is the official policy of the Muslim side of the Bosnian government. That policy has been adopted by the prosecutor's office in The Hague, and now apparently adopted by the Department of Justice in Washington."

Assistant U.S. Attorney Elizabeth Blackwood, who is prosecuting the case, confirmed that similar prosecutions are taking place around the country. She declined to comment further.

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## **16 Charged with Concealing Service in Bosnian Serb Military to Successfully Enter the U.S. as Refugees**

WASHINGTON— Sixteen individuals in six states have been charged with criminal violations in connection with their efforts to obtain refugee status in the United States by concealing their prior service in the Bosnian Serb military, Deputy Attorney General Paul J. McNulty and Assistant Secretary for U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Julie L. Myers announced today.

According to indictments and criminal complaints filed in the Middle District of Florida, the Eastern District of Wisconsin, the Middle District of North Carolina, the District of Colorado, the Eastern District of Michigan, and Northern District of Ohio, the defendants previously served in the Bosnian Serb military. One of the defendants, Nedjo Ikonic, 40, is described in a federal affidavit in Wisconsin as having been a commander of a police unit that cooperated with other Bosnian Serb entities in the July 1995 massacre of Muslims in Srebrenica. According to the court documents, the defendants allegedly committed immigration fraud and/or made false statements by concealing their prior service in these Bosnian Serb military units when filing immigration applications with the U.S. government. Through these fraudulent applications, the defendants were able to gain refugee status allowing them to enter and reside in the United States. One of the defendants was ultimately able to gain U.S. citizenship.

During the past week, special agents from ICE arrested 13 of the defendants in Orlando, St. Petersburg (Fla), Raleigh, High Point (NC), Milwaukee, Detroit, Cleveland, and Denver. The remaining criminal defendants are at large.

All but one of the defendants face criminal charges that include immigration fraud and/or making false statements. The maximum sentence for making false statements is five years in prison, while the maximum sentence for immigration fraud is 10 years imprisonment. One defendant has been charged with unlawful procurement of citizenship, which carries a maximum potential sentence of 10 years imprisonment.

"These cases demonstrate our resolve to identify and prosecute those who enter this country under false pretenses, especially those who hide their military past," said Deputy Attorney General Paul J. McNulty.

"Since it was founded, the United States has attracted refugees escaping from persecution and atrocities in their countries of origin," said ICE Assistant Secretary Myers. "ICE will not allow the United States to be a safe haven for those who failed to disclose their service in military forces that were known to commit atrocities. We will continue to work closely with our international partners to relentlessly pursue such criminals." These cases were investigated by special agents from U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) with assistance from the Office of Special Investigations (OSI) of the Justice Department's Criminal Division.

These cases are being prosecuted by the U.S. Attorney's Offices for the Middle District of Florida;

Eastern District of Wisconsin; Middle District of North Carolina; District of Colorado; Eastern District of Michigan; and Northern District of Ohio. The Office of Special Investigations is participating in the prosecution of the U.S. citizen defendant in Tampa. The indictments and criminal complaints filed in these cases contain mere allegations. The defendants are presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty.

The defendants are as follows:

Middle District of Florida

- 12/28 \*Sekula Bilic, indicted on one count of immigration fraud and one count of making false statements.
- 1/3 \*Zdravko Kordic, indicted on one count of immigration fraud.
- \*Branko Popic, indicted on one count of immigration fraud and one count of making false statements.
- 12/28 \*Ostoja Saric, indicted on one count of immigration fraud and one count of making false statements.
- 1/3 \*Strahinja Krsmanovic, indicted on one count of immigration fraud.
- \*Boro Stojanovic, indicted on one count of immigration fraud.
- 1/3 \*Jadranko Gostic, indicted on one count of unlawful procurement of citizenship and one count of making false statements.

\*Zoran Radic, indicted on one count of immigration fraud and making false statements. Radic remains at large.

\*Dusan Bosnjak, indicted on one count of immigration fraud and making false statements. Bosnjak remains at large.

\*Bogdan Panic, indicted on one count of naturalization fraud and making false statements. Panic remains at large.

Eastern District of Wisconsin

\*Nedjo Ikonic, charged with one count of immigration fraud.

Middle District of North Carolina

\*Mlivoje Jankovic, indicted on two counts of immigration fraud and two counts of making false statements.

\*Veselin Vidacak, indicted on two counts of immigration fraud and two counts of making false statements.

District of Colorado

\*Milisav Vukovic, charged with one count of false statements.

Eastern District of Michigan

\*Nedjo Lojpur, indicted on two counts of immigration fraud.

Northern District of Ohio

\*Ratko Maslenjak, charged with one count of immigration fraud.

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