



UNITED NATIONS

## International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals

*The International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals (“Mechanism”) was established on 22 December 2010 by the United Nations Security Council to continue the jurisdiction, rights, obligations and essential functions of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (“ICTR”) and the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (“ICTY”) which closed in 2015 and 2017, respectively.*

# STATEMENT

PRESIDENT

*(Exclusively for the use of the media. Not an official document)*

The Hague, 16 April 2023

## Judge Graciela Gatti Santana, IRMCT President Remarks for 30th Commemoration of crimes in Ahmići Sunday, 16 April 2023

Excellencies,  
Esteemed victims and survivors,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

I wish to first of all express my deep gratitude to the “Association 16 April Ahmići” for inviting me to attend this solemn ceremony, commemorating 30 years since the terrible atrocities that took place here in Ahmići. I am most honoured to be here during this Holy Month of Ramadan and on Orthodox Easter Sunday.

On behalf of the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals (Mechanism) allow me to pay my respects to the victims – not only those who were so senselessly killed, but also those who stayed behind, grieving the loss of their loved ones, of their homes, and of their lives as they knew them until then.

The crimes committed three decades ago were the subject of a number of cases tried before the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY). This jurisprudence established unequivocally that the attacks against Ahmići and other locations in Lašva Valley were part of a larger military campaign, intended to ethnically cleanse the region of its Muslim population. In a matter of mere hours, Bosnian Croat troops killed more than 100 inhabitants of this village, including women and children, destroyed over 160 houses and two mosques, and slaughtered livestock. As the ICTY found, these acts were aimed to spread terror, in order to force the Muslim inhabitants to leave and deter them from ever returning. The ICTY held that these acts constituted crimes against humanity and war crimes.

While some of the accused were acquitted, others were convicted and sentenced to many years’ imprisonment for their role in these crimes. Among them, Dario Kordić, one of the leading political figures in the Bosnian Croat community during the conflict; Miroslav Bralo, member of the special unit of the military police called the “Jokers”; and Drago Josipović, member of the Croatian Defence Council (HVO) in the village of Šantići. In addition, the ICTY indicted Paško Ljubičić, the highest-ranking member of the HVO Military Police, whose case was later transferred to the Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The events we commemorate today are a shocking reminder of how normal lives can change fundamentally from one day to the next; how a neighbour can turn against a neighbour. As the ICTY Trial Chamber stated in the Kupreškić et al. case, “what happened on the 16th of April, 1993 in Ahmići has gone down in history as comprising

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one of the most vicious illustrations of man's inhumanity to man. [...] the name of that small village must be added to the long list of previously unknown hamlets and towns that recall abhorrent misdeeds and make us all shudder with horror and shame.”

It is everyone's duty to accept what took place in Ahmići and what has been judicially established, including the responsibility of those who perpetrated the crimes. This is especially important when forces of denial and revisionism threaten to undermine the truth. Despite such dangerous phenomena, the events of 16 April can never be erased; they will remain part of history and must not be forgotten. And although it is painful to acknowledge and confront the past, doing so is necessary in order to move forward and build a better future, together. We owe this to the next generations.

In this respect, national authorities must play a part in ensuring that the judicial findings and broader legacy of the ICTY and the Mechanism are widely available, especially as we will soon be completing the final core-crimes case relating to the former Yugoslavia. In accordance with its founding resolution, the Mechanism has encouraged national authorities to establish information centres where the public judicial records of the ICTY and the Mechanism can be made easily accessible to anyone interested in them. One such centre has already been opened in Sarajevo, and we are hoping that others will be established across the region.

I also want to reassure you that the Mechanism will continue to preserve and promote the ICTY's legacy, to protect victims and witnesses, and to make sure that their voices continue to be heard. While our Field Office in Sarajevo closed at the end of March, this will not affect the mandate entrusted to the Mechanism by the Security Council, which we will continue to carry out from our branch in The Hague.

It is worth noting that in May, we will mark another important anniversary, being 30 years since the ICTY was established, just a few weeks after the events in Ahmići. This milestone highlights the efforts and achievements of the international community in delivering justice to victims of the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia, but it reminds us, too, that there is more to be done.

In closing, allow me to share how humbled I am by the incredible courage that you, the people of Ahmići, have shown in dealing with the past and rebuilding your lives. I also want to emphasise that it is because of your willingness to tell your stories, and to shine a light on the truth, that the ICTY and local courts were able to bring to justice those responsible for the crimes. Your resilience is truly inspiring. On this day, therefore, let us honour all of the victims and survivors, and trust that a brighter future lies ahead for your strong and remarkable community.

I thank you sincerely for your attention.

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