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REPUBLIC OF BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

TUZLA MUNICIPALITY

STATE COMMISSION FOR GATHERING
FACTS ON WAR CRIMES

TUZLA

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STATEMENT TAKEN IN THE OJ¹ TRAIN

On 20 July 1996, the State Commission for Gathering Facts on War Crimes, Tuzla [Department], was approached by a person who had not been invited [to testify], BEĆIR SALIHOVIĆ, son-~~daughter~~ of BEGO, born on 20 January 1973 199 in Zilići, VLASENICA municipality, citizen of RBiH², a BOSNIAK by nationality, family status married, ID card No. 3477/96 and the body that issued it Zavidovići, personal identification number [REDACTED], now temporarily residing in Vožuća - Zavidovići, Street [name] and [house] number Miljevići, and in connection to the events that took place during the time of the aggression against the RBiH and his place of birth, or residence, by the former JNA³ and Chetniks⁴, he expressed his desire to give the following

S T A T E M E N T

¹ Translator's note: expansion unknown; perhaps Armed Units

² t/n: Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina

³ t/n: Yugoslav People's Army

⁴ t/n: derogatory term for Serbs - members of Yugoslav royalist and Serbian nationalist movement in World War II in Yugoslavia

I was born in the village of Zilići in Vlasenica municipality where I used to live with my family until April 1992. On 25 April that year when the Chetniks attacked our village, i.e. when the threat of a Chetnik attack on our village arose, together with my family (my father Bego, my mother Ćima, and my brother Bekir) I left our village and moved to the village of Gornje Vrsinje where I stayed for 10 days, and then I went to Podžeplje where I also stayed for about 10 days together with my family, and from there all of us together moved to the village of Sućeska - hamlet of Rastahovina. In this area I stayed up until 11 July 1995, i.e. the day when Srebrenica and its surroundings fell into the hands of the aggressors - the Chetnik forces. During my stay in Sućeska, the Chetniks used to attack and shell the settlement pretty much on a daily basis and [in those attacks] civilians were killed or wounded, most of them women and children. Since there were many cases of killings and woundings of the locals (civilians) of Sućeska during the shelling attacks, I would just like to mention that my cousin's daughter Indira was severely injured and she died from the injuries she sustained, as did Mevludin Fejzić, Hama Fejzić, Ibrahim Fejzić, all of whom were killed on the spot by one single mortar shell. Besides the shelling of Sućeska, the Chetniks also used artillery and bombed Sućeska more than once from Rogač, Koprivno, Derventa, and other surrounding hills; I also know that on one occasion MiG⁵ aircrafts were engaged in it, while agricultural aircrafts were engaged in it on several occasions. The first ones, the MiG aircrafts, probably came from Serbia, while the agricultural aircrafts, according to rumours, came from Bratunac.

Like I mentioned earlier, I stayed in Sućeska until 11 July 1995 when we were notified that we were to start withdrawing or, in other words, to leave Sućeska, thus we - I am referring to my family that consisted of my father, mother, and brother, and also my wife, since I had

[signature: Salihović Bećir]

⁵ t/n: Russian Aircraft Corporation MiG

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gotten married in Sućeska in the meanwhile - headed in the direction of Potočari⁶, and together with the troops I went to the village of Jaglić, where a large number of both ARBiH fighters and civilians gathered; those civilians planned to break through the forests together with the fighters and go in the direction of Tuzla.

I do not know what my family [members] had to live through in Potočari and on their way to Tuzla. However, as for the things I witnessed, I can mention the following:

When we arrived to the village of Jaglić, I saw a large number of gathered soldiers and civilians; I think that there could have been around 15,000 persons. I arrived to Jaglić on 11 July 1995 and in the evening of that day, one part of the troops and civilians set off, heading in the direction of Kamenica Pobuđska, and the next day, around 1200 hours on 12 July 1995, the remaining group of gathered soldiers and civilians set off and also headed in the direction of Pobuđska Kamenica; I think there were between five and six thousand of us. When we arrived near an elevation point called Buljim, we were ambushed by the Chetniks and they opened fire on us with all available weapons, both artillery and infantry weapons, and a large number of people were killed or wounded. I myself saw approximately 20 killed persons and around 50 wounded, and I saw one shell kill five (5) people, mainly civilians, who were near me at that time.

While we were breaking through from this area towards the path that the first group of our people had taken, we ran across warnings, i.e. signs that said "MINES". I presume these signs were left there by our people who had passed through those areas before us. From there we headed in the direction of Pobuđska Kamenica where we linked up with one part of the first group,

⁶ t/n: as printed

but there we were surrounded by the Chetniks and once again they opened fire on us, and over 300 people were killed and a significant number of [our people] were wounded. Then chaos ensued because both soldiers and civilians were running in all directions, and those wounded remained [?lying] on the path. I and one group, a total of 10 of us among whom was Mehmed Suljić and Hazim [?Suljić], also from Srebrenica, headed in the direction of Kaldrmica, and on our way there we came across one of our people, a civilian whose nose and ears had been cut off and who begged us to kill him. We did not do that, thus he remained there in that area. We were moving throughout that entire night and in the morning when we came near the asphalt road in Kaldrmica, Chetniks appeared from one meadow and captured all of us. They ordered us to put our hands behind our heads and they escorted us to the primary school in Nova Kasaba, where they took away all of our things and belongings, and then they ordered us to line up against the wall and threatened that they would kill us all.

After that they locked us in one classroom, and in the afternoon, on the pretence that we would be taken for an exchange, they took us to a playfield - the Mravinci stadium in N. Kasaba⁷. At the stadium there was a great mass of captured soldiers and civilians; I think there were several hundreds of us, and the mass of people kept growing because they were [still] bringing those that they captured in the surrounding areas. On the afternoon of that day, i.e. 13 July, to this place, the Mravinci stadium, arrived General RATKO MLADIĆ himself. I recognised that he was Ratko Mladić since I had seen him multiple times on television, and also because the Chetniks themselves had told us that he would come to this place in order to announce some things to us. At that point, we were told by Mladić himself that we would be taken to Bratunac to have lunch, and that there were a hundred lines around us and that no one could escape and get to the free territory, i.e. to Tuzla. During that time, one photojournalist was using a camera to record the mass of captured soldiers and civilians that were at the stadium. I personally saw one of the captured civilians, who was probably feeling mentally unstable, stand up and straighten up (all of us at the stadium had to be sitting down) and then

⁷ t/n: Nova Kasaba

three Chetniks came up to him and forced him to sit down while hitting him with rifle butts and their hands and kicking him, and then one of them, using a gun, killed that man by shooting him with a gun.

[signature: Salihović Bećir]

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In the late afternoon of that same day, i.e. on 13 July 1995, buses arrived, and as far as I remember there were more than five of them and they picked us from the stadium up and took us to Bratunac. On the way to Bratunac, when entering Kravica, I saw a large number of dead civilians and soldiers next to the warehouse, left of it, more specifically, by the right side of the road, while by the left side of the road there was a large number of captured civilians and soldiers who were sitting on a meadow by the side of the road. In Bratunac, we were driven to one school, but I do not know what it is called. There, the Chetniks made us stay in those buses throughout that entire night and, as a matter of fact, some of the Chetniks entered the buses and would take one or two men outside, and then we would hear gunshots. From the bus that that I was in they took one man whose name and surname I do not know and they led him outside and he never returned to that bus. On the morning of the next day, on 14 July, in order to maltreat us as much as possible, the Chetniks turned on the heating in the buses, windows and doors of which were closed, and it was difficult to endure that because the month of July was very hot, and they turned the heating on.⁸

In the evening of that day, 14 July, after we had spent 24 hours inside those buses in Bratunac with no food or water, we set off for an alleged exchange, since that is what we were told by

⁸ t/n: as printed

those that were escorting the buses, so we took the old road from Bratunac to Drinjača, and then through Zvornik to Pilica, more specifically to the school in Pilica. This was where we got out of the buses and settled ourselves in the rooms of the school which was a two-storey building, and we - one part of us - settled ourselves in the school gym, while the others settled themselves in other classrooms and even in the hallway. We stayed in this school for two nights and one day, i.e. the night of 14 [July], both day and night of 15 July, and on the morning of 16 July I left the school together with one group of people. During the time we had spent in the school we were given no food or water. It was not until 15 [July] that six of us volunteered to bring three tubs of water from the area below the school, from one brook. When we filled one tub, we noticed that a bus arrived to one meadow above the school, and civilians escorted by Chetniks were coming out of it, and those Chetniks immediately killed with automatic weapons all those that had come out of the bus. I personally saw that happen and I personally heard the gunshots, means, and yelling, as well as screaming. This happened 30 or, at the most, 40 metres away from the place where we were standing.

When that happened, the Chetniks who had been escorting us on our way to get the water immediately ordered us to stop pouring the water and to go inside the school, which we did. I do not know what happened later to the bodies of those that had been killed, and I could not even see that from the school because that had happened above the school at a distance of around 20 metres from it, but I was inside the gym and from there I could not see anything, but perhaps some other people who were in the classrooms could have seen **[what had happened to the bodies of the killed]**.

The Chetniks entered our rooms that day and requested gold and money from us, and when they got it from some people, then they ordered us that we had to collect DM⁹ 10,000 and hand it over to them. However, we did not have that **[money]** and we could not collect it. It is true that the Chetniks asked whether any of us wanted to join FIKRET ABDIĆ, but I do not know if anyone accepted to do that. I do not remember that they offered to take those who could pay them 200 marks to Sarajevo. Perhaps that did happen in other rooms, but it did not happen in my room.

⁹ t/n: Deutsche Marks, German Marks

On the morning of 16 [July], around 0700 hours, they started bringing [people] out of the school and had them board the buses, and I got out of the school sometime around 0730 hours and I boarded one bus. In each of the buses there were around 80 of us, because besides three men who would sit in the two bus seats, there were many of those that were standing between the seats. We drove in the bus for around five minutes and when we reached one meadow, the bus stopped and those that were escorting us and were inside the bus with us, started taking out 10 [men] at a time from the bus, their hands tied, and leading them in the direction of that meadow. Not long after that we heard gunshots, and then those that were escorting us would return and take out another 10 of us from the bus.

[signature: Salihović Bećir]

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Since I was in the middle of the bus, it was my turn to go with the third or the fourth group, so I [got out] of the bus in a column and with my hands tied, escorted by a group of Chetniks that had taken us over from those Chetniks who had escorted us in the bus, and they led us in the direction of the meadow. I do not know who those Chetniks were and at that point I did not hear them call each other by their names or nicknames. This group of Chetniks was leading us in the direction of the meadow, and one of them asked us then "whether either one of us had someone abroad who could pay for us so he would set us free".¹⁰ A few men made themselves known, but I do not know who they are. When I got to the meadow I saw many rows of bodies of civilians and soldiers who had been murdered. The rows were the length of the meadow, which was quite big, and we were then placed to stand at the start of a new row. We were standing with our hands

¹⁰ t/n: as printed

tied, while the Chetniks were standing next to us, i.e. we were in a column, standing one next to another with our hands tied, each of us with our heads down against [the back of] those in front of us, and on our side, our right side, was the group of Chetniks that brought us there. When we stopped there, without any [verbal] command, the Chetniks opened fire with automatic weapons on us. We fell to the ground, and I, before they even fired, dropped to the ground which is how I avoided being directly shot. One of the killed landed on top of me and his blood splattered all over me which gave the appearance that I, too, was dead. After that, the Chetniks walked among [us] and then they shot at all of the executed. I did not see it but I heard one of the Chetniks telling another one, "Don't shoot them in the head anymore, shoot them in the back," which he probably did because when he got to me, he fired, and the bullet went between my arm and my torso, thus it did not injure me. After this, the Chetniks left this area to go and bring a new group [there], and I still remained lying down so I could feel when the second group was brought there, as well as the other groups. The same happened to them what had happened to my group. Lying like this, sometime around dusk I heard some engine running, thus I presumed that the Chetniks were bringing some machines to pick up the dead. I could hear the machine running for a while, and it was near me, and then that machine went away. After that, I checked whether there were any Chetniks [around] and when I established that there were not any Chetniks there at that moment, I seized the opportunity and fled the execution spot and went into one field with corn growing in it, and I hid there for some time. While running in the direction of that forest I saw a pile of bodies of executed persons that had most likely been brought there by that machine which I heard [running] while I was still lying down. They were most likely dumped out of the machine in one place so they made a pile.

While I was inside the school, I saw a number of my acquaintances who were also held captive in this school and among them were: Ramiz Salihović, Zulfo Ademović, Hurem Turković, Husein Gabeljić, Adem Omerović, and others whose names I do not know.

I spent the rest of the night in the field that I had hidden in, and before the dawn I got out of it through the corn and went

into one brook, the name of which I do not know, where I spent that day, i.e. 17 July 1995. During the night [following] that day, while moving through forests and meadows I came across Ahmo Hasić and that was when I learned from him that he, too, had been at the execution and managed to flee, and that at that point he was roaming the forests with no idea where he was. Together we continued roaming and it was not until the second day, i.e. 19 July 1995, that we came across Abdulah Dahalić who told us that he suffered the same fate, i.e. he was at the execution. Together we walked the forests for two to three days when we somehow lost the above-named Dahalić, and we did not find him. Later he told us that he had gone to find some fruit to eat and that was how he got lost from us. As we walked exhausted and without any food, on 26 July 1995, in the area near Teočak we stumbled upon Chetniks who captured us and handed us over to their military police. They immediately had us board one "van-bus"¹¹ in which there were no

[signature: Salihović Bećir]

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other civilians but the two of us, and as for military personnel, there were only two police officers and one driver. In this bus we headed from the place where we had been captured towards Karakaj, and when we arrived to one rather big settlement the bus stopped outside one shop. I do not know the name of the settlement, nor do I know what the shop was called; I can just say that [a man came out of] the shop, who was the owner of the shop and who told us that he had been living in Germany for 24 years, and he treated us to a lunch - none other than chorba¹², salad, [and] potatoes - and gave us a litre of juice and each a pack of cigarettes, and then we continued our journey. As

¹¹ t/n: as printed

¹² t/n: one of various kinds of soup or stew found in national cuisines of Eurasian countries

a matter of fact, the bus stopped in this settlement because the military police officers wanted to have lunch and something to drink, which is how we, too, as I previously mentioned, got the cigarettes and food.

When we arrived to Karakaj we got off the bus, escorted by the above-mentioned police officers, and since there was one truck in which there were 25 to 30 civilians with their hands tied, the police officers who brought us, escorted us, ordered us to climb that truck as well, which we did. When we climbed the above-mentioned truck, they tied our hands, too, and we were taken in that truck to Batkovići near Bijeljina, where in the camp we were immediately registered with the Red Cross that was there at that moment, and we were given the opportunity to send messages if we wanted to, saying that they would take those messages to Tuzla.

The day after we had arrived to the Batković camp, I - as well as others, I believe - was taken to be interrogated by the person in charge there, and his name was ČEKIĆ, and I think he held the rank of an officer, I just do not know which rank. The interrogation was focused on whether I had been in the army, who were my family members, where they were at that point and what were their jobs, and so on. During this interrogation, I was not maltreated, and I also was not maltreated throughout the entire time that I spent in this camp, i.e. until 24 December 1995. From a guard, i.e. a supervisor, I learned that there were some LUJIĆ and VI[?]IĆ, whose first names I do not know, but they did not maltreat me either.

During the first two months that I spent in the Batković camp, I was not engaged in any work. During that time we were not satisfied with [the amount] of food, because we would be given only two meals within 24 hours time, and after that I was transferred to [a] labour [?group], more specifically, in order to dig trenches near [?Brčko], right next to the Sava [River], but I do not know the exact name of that place, and I stayed there for 10 days. When we returned to Batkovići, I was designated to go and harvest [produce] (potatoes, cabbage, peppers, corn) in a place called Jenja [?and in this village]. I laboured there the entire time, i.e. until the day when the exchange was carried out. During the time that I had laboured in Jenja I met [illegible] Mehmedalija and [illegible]

who at the time worked in the storage room of the Serbian Army in Janja, and who told me that at the beginning of the war they, too, had been in the camp but that they were at that moment working for the Serbian Army which was also why they were wearing their uniforms. I do not know the surnames of these two men.

On [?]4 December 1995, together with other prisoners, I was exchanged in a place called Gračanica near Doboј, and since then I have been with my family in the free territory, more specifically in Vozuća - Stošnica.

It should be noted that approximately 15 after we had arrived to the Batković camp, Abdulah Dahalić was brought there as well, and that was when he told us how he had gotten lost and that he had been captured somewhere near Janja.

I wish to point out that I could recognise the place where the executions were carried out, and most likely I could also show you the path I took while I was wondering around forests and meadows.

[signature: Salihović Bećir]

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I have nothing else to state; I have read the statement and I acknowledge it in its entirety as my own since all the words I said were entered in it, thus as such sign it in my own hand.

Statement taken by:
Member of the DKZ[?]Z¹³, Tuzla [Dept.]
Esad [?]odžić
[signature: illegible]

Recording clerk:
Miralem Džam[?]ić
[signature: illegible]

Statement given by:
Bećir Salihović
[signature: Salihović Bećir]

¹³ t/n: most likely an abbreviation for the State Commission for War Crimes