

Fears grow for 7,000 Muslims missing from Srebrenica

UN envoy condemns 'barbaric' Serbs

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BARBARIC acts, including attacks on civilians, killings and rapes, have been carried out by Bosnian Serbs since they took the former "safe area" of Srebrenica, the United Nations special envoy for human rights said yesterday.

In his first official comment on the new flare-up in fighting, Tadeusz Mazowiecki said further investigation was needed to determine the extent of the atrocities reported by Muslim refugees and UN peacekeepers, but he left no doubt that outrages had been widespread.

Speaking at a press conference in the northern Bosnian town of Tuzla, the Polish diplomat said 7,000 people were missing from Srebrenica after its fall to Serb forces on July 11. Mr Mazowiecki does not normally make public statements, reserving his comments for written UN reports.

Over the past week UN officials have interviewed refugees from Srebrenica, 6,500 of whom are staying at a camp in Tuzla. Red Cross personnel have done the same but have not publicised their findings.

"These events require a thor-

ough investigation," Mr Mazowiecki said. "But I can say that what happened cannot be described as [moderate] violations of human rights but as extremely serious violations on an enormous scale."

"Barbaric acts have been committed."

Scores of refugees have described killings, rapes, mutilations and forced family separations. But analysts caution that atrocities in wartime are almost invariably exaggerated by confusion, fear, propaganda or psychological warfare.

In the case of Srebrenica, the picture is complicated by the fact that the Bosnian Serbs have denied access to the area.

Tony Burgener, a spokesman for the International Committee of the Red Cross in Geneva, said a dossier was being compiled to present to the Bosnian Serb authorities in Pale.

Britain too is deeply concerned. "Reports that have come through are of sufficient frequency and barbarity to think that something pretty awful must have gone on," a Foreign Office official said. "Clearly this is something that needs investigating and the evidence passing on to the war crimes tribunal."

The most detailed independent accounts of atrocities

come from the Dutch UN peacekeepers who were in the enclave when it was overrun. The Dutch defence minister, Joris Voorhoeve, said they saw "terrible things, but what our soldiers saw does not account for the disappearance of thousands of people."

Two Dutch soldiers saw nine Muslim men taken to a building for interrogation and then heard gunfire. They later found the corpses of the nine with bullet wounds in their backs.

"We have heard an account of a Serb couple from Bratunac, and according to that couple 1,600 people were killed in a school yard," Mr Voorhoeve said. One report from the Serbian border last week said that as many as 4,000 captured Muslims had been killed.

But Dutch soldiers could not confirm allegations that many Muslim women were raped by Serb soldiers after being removed from Serb-run expulsion convoys.

Belgrade, meanwhile, has said it will no longer co-operate with Mr Mazowiecki because his reports on human rights in Yugoslavia, especially in the Albanian-majority province of Kosovo, were "extremely one-sided" and politically motivated, the independent news agency Beta reported.

Serb atrocities in Srebrenica are unproved

By Tim Butcher in Tuzla

AFTER five days of interviews the United Nations chief investigator into alleged human rights abuses during the fall of Srebrenica has not found any first-hand witnesses of atrocities.

The lack of clear evidence facing Hubert Wieland, personal representative of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, proved the near-impossibility of establishing what happened when the Serbs overran the Muslim enclave.

"Of course the whole ejection of a civilian population is an enormous abuse of human rights," Mr Wieland said yesterday. "But we have not found anyone who saw with their own eyes an atrocity taking place."

Mr Wieland travelled to Tuzla, the Bosnian city where almost all of the Srebrenica refugees were taken, with a team of investigators to gather evidence of human rights abuses.

He said his team had spoken to scores of Muslims at the main refugee camp at Tuzla airfield and at other collective centres but no first-hand witnesses had been found.

"There are still many thousands of people unaccounted for and it is possible they themselves saw violations," Mr Wieland, a Peruvian diplomat, said. "Lots of people told of dead civilians by the roadside but how they came to die we do not know."

He said the interviewees, many of whom did not want to give their names, said they had seen mutilated bodies by the roadside, some with their throats cut or their limbs removed and at least one with a butcher's hook through his throat.

The lack of first-hand witnesses does not disprove that atrocities took place in Srebrenica. But it shows how difficult it is to get to the truth.

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