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**DRAMATIC TESTIMONY ON CLOSING DAY OF  
BOSNIAN TORTURE TRIAL**

*San Francisco, October 24, 2001* - The civil trial brought by four Bosnian Muslims against Nikola Vukovic, the man they accuse of torturing them in 1992 as part of the Bosnian Serb campaign of ethnic cleansing, concluded yesterday, October 23rd. This was the first case of this kind against a Bosnian living in the United States.

Kemal Mehinovic, who initiated the lawsuit in 1998, said at the end of the trial, "I am satisfied. I brought this case because I feel an obligation towards those who were killed or suffered extreme cruelty because of acts Vukovic committed or in which he participated. I survived. I have an obligation to tell their stories and to seek justice on their behalf. It is important that the public knows what happened, that they know what our lives were like before all of this happened, and that they know that we did nothing, nothing at all, to provoke these acts."

Kemal testified that, on one occasion, Vukovic beat him until he fell down and then kicked him so hard on the side of his face that he continues to experience constant pain. Vukovic was also present on several occasions when Stevan Todorovic, the Serb police chief of Bosanski Samac, brutally beat Mehinovic, breaking a finger and causing severe head injuries. Todorovic confessed in December 2000, before the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in The Hague, to having committed a crime against humanity - based on numerous acts of torture against non-Serbs.

Muhamed Bicic testified in the civil action from the Hague - where he is scheduled to testify in a related criminal case - that, during one 10-day period, he was beaten more than 100 times. Eight ribs were broken, his nose was dislocated, and he continues to endure severe headaches. He was forced to sing Serb nationalist songs as a group of Serbs broke his brother's fingers.

Safet Hadzialijagic testified that, during one beating, Vukovic smashed his face with his army boot. Vukovic then forced Mr. Hadzialijagic to lick his blood from Vukovic's boots and from the floor. On another occasion, Vukovic put a gun in his mouth and pulled the trigger two times. The gun did not discharge. He then pointed at a window and shattered the pane with a live bullet. On a third occasion, Vukovic tied him to a rope and hung him upside down. As he neared losing consciousness, Vukovic dunked his head into a bucket used as toilet for the prisoners.

Hasan Subasic testified that Vukovic kicked and beat him brutally on two separate occasions, and that he was beaten several times by others.

Each plaintiff testified that, as part of their torture, they had teeth forcibly extracted with pliers. More than 190 teeth were extracted from prisoners at the detention center where three of them were held. Each testified that they saw other prisoners beaten and shot to death.

Each testified that, for several months on end, all they were given to eat was a slice of bread a day - smeared with pork fat, an added insult to their religion. Each plaintiff lost nearly half of his body weight during detention (between 30 and 50 kgs. each).

Mr. Vukovic was not at the trial. He has left his home in the Atlanta area. His former lawyer says that Mr. Vukovic's family told him that Mr. Vukovic went to Europe. It is possible that he went to the home of his mother, who is believed to live in Croatia, or to the home of his wife's mother, who is believed to live in Tampa or Jacksonville, Florida. The four plaintiffs are represented by the Center for Justice & Accountability (CJA), a human rights law organization based in San Francisco. Sandra Coliver, CJA's Executive Director, stated: "Justice has been served because the victims had their day in court, and Mr. Vukovic has been forced to flee his current home in the Atlanta area. He will have to live as a fugitive, unless he decides to accept responsibility for his crimes. We will search for Mr. Vukovic. We will notify the Immigration and Naturalization Service to put his name on the border control watch list. If he manages to re-enter the United States, we will work to have him arrested for fraud and perjury in gaining entry to the U.S., and deported.

"This case demonstrates that the U.S. system of justice is available to redress international crimes, from terrorism to torture, and regardless of whether the victims are U.S. citizens or non-citizens, Muslims or Christians. The case sends the message that the U.S. will not be a safe haven for torturers and war criminals. When there is solid evidence that a person who lives in this country has committed crimes of this magnitude, justice demands that he be brought before a U.S. court and held accountable."

CJA will submit a request to Judge Shoob for a multi-million dollar award for the plaintiffs, in order to send two messages: first, that the U.S. legal system considers these crimes heinous under U.S. and international law; and second, that any money that Mr. Vukovic earns for the rest of his life, beyond the minimum necessary to support his family, should go to helping his victims rebuild their lives. CJA expects that Judge Shoob will render a verdict within two months or so.

Lead counsel on the case is volunteer CJA attorney Paul Hoffman of the law firm of Schonbrun, DeSimone, Seplow, Harris & Hoffman in Venice, California. Gerald Weber, Legal Director of the ACLU of Georgia and Robert Tsai, ACLU staff attorney, are co-counsel, together with Joshua Sondheimer, CJA's Litigation Director. The San Francisco law firm of Brobeck, Phleger and Harrison provided assistance on the case.