



REUTERS

U.N. must accept Srebrenica responsibility - lawyer

Thu, Jan 28 2010

* U.N. showed little respect to victims' families -lawyer

* Immunity means relatives "have nowhere to turn"

By Aaron Gray-Block

AMSTERDAM, Jan 28 (Reuters) - A lawyer representing relatives of those killed in the Srebrenica massacre told a Dutch court on Thursday the United Nations must accept responsibility for the mass execution, carried out during the 1992-95 war in Bosnia.

A ruling in July 2008 determined that the U.N. could not be called before any court of law, a blow to a suit filed in 2007 by victims' families against the Dutch state and the U.N. for failing to prevent the Srebrenica killings.

Marco Gerritsen, representing 6,000 relatives of the victims, told an appeals hearing in The Hague families had sought truth, recognition and compensation for 15 years and criticised the U.N. for not being prepared to defend itself in court.

"This attitude of the U.N. is evidence of the little respect shown to the thousands of victims who were abused, deported and murdered despite the presence of the U.N. soldiers," Gerritsen said.

About 8,000 Bosnian Muslim men and boys were murdered at Srebrenica in 1995 after Bosnian Serb forces overran the U.N.-protected enclave where Dutch peacekeeping troops were stationed to protect civilians.

In a case brought by Bosnia, the International Court of Justice ruled in 2007 the massacre constituted genocide.

The Netherlands has said its troops were abandoned by the U.N., which gave them no air support.

Gerritsen also criticised the Dutch state on Thursday, accusing it of playing a double role.

He said the Netherlands argued it could not be held accountable for the events at Srebrenica and was shifting the responsibility to the United Nations while at the same time arguing in favour of the U.N.'s immunity.

"The consequence of this ... is that the 6,000 surviving relatives of the victims of the genocide have nowhere to turn," Gerritsen said, adding that this was "humanely, morally and legally unacceptable."

Lawyers representing the Srebrenica relatives are seeking a ruling that the U.N. does not have immunity and is liable for the killings. They have vowed to take the case to the European Court of Justice if it is not settled by the Dutch legal system.

Thursday's hearing dealt only with the appeal against U.N. immunity, while the issue of whether the Dutch state also had immunity was still to be decided. (Editing by Andrew Dobbie)

© Thomson Reuters 2010. All rights reserved. Users may download and print extracts of content from this website for their own personal and non-commercial use only. Republication or redistribution of Thomson Reuters content, including by framing or similar means, is expressly prohibited without the prior written consent of Thomson Reuters. Thomson Reuters and its logo are registered trademarks or trademarks of the Thomson Reuters group of companies around the world.

Thomson Reuters journalists are subject to an Editorial Handbook which requires fair presentation and disclosure of relevant interests.