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## Srebrenica Families Sue Dutch State, U.N.

By REUTERS

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THE HAGUE (Reuters) - Angry relatives of victims of the 1995 Srebrenica massacre on Monday sued the Dutch state and the United Nations for allowing thousands of Muslims to be killed by Bosnian Serb forces.

Lawyers said the Dutch were to blame for refusing crucial air support to their own troops defending the Bosnian town under a U.N. mandate, clearing the way for the killing of 8,000-10,000 men and boys.

About 200 women, relatives of the Srebrenica victims, marched to Dutch Prime Minister Jan Peter Balkenende's office and handed in legal documents.

Carrying banners with the victims' names, the grim-faced women walked silently in circles outside the ministry, close to Parliament, for more than an hour.

"I have waited for 12 years for this, this could be another injustice if it is going to take a long time again," said Munera Subasic, chairwoman of the Foundation of Mothers of Srebrenica.

During the 1992-95 Bosnian war, Srebrenica was declared a safe area and guarded by a Dutch army unit serving as part of a larger U.N. force in Bosnia.

The lightly armed Dutch soldiers, lacking air support and under fire, were forced to abandon the enclave to Bosnian Serb forces, who took away and massacred Muslim men and boys who had relied on the protection of the Dutch troops.

"Shortly before the fall of the safe area air support was obstructed by the Netherlands itself," lawyers Axel Hagedorn and Marco Gerritsen of Dutch firm Van Diepen Van der Kroef said in the writ of summons filed at the district court of The Hague and made available to Reuters.

### LEGAL DOCUMENTS

A spokesman for Balkenende's office said on Friday the Dutch state would not comment until it had received the legal documents.

About 6,000 relatives of Srebrenica victims, who have been dismayed by the failure of the two fugitive chief suspects to be brought to justice, are seeking recognition and redress for this tragedy.

Former Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic and former Bosnian Serb Army chief Ratko Mladic are still on the run, wanted by the U.N. war crimes tribunal in The Hague on genocide charges.

In February the U.N.'s highest court cleared Serbia of genocide at Srebrenica, though it pronounced Belgrade guilty of failing to prevent genocide. Many Bosnian Muslims saw this as a further injustice against them.

The Dutch state has always said its troops were abandoned by the U.N. which gave them no air support, but

public documents show a network of Dutch military officials within the U.N. Protection Force blocked air support because they feared their soldiers could be hit by friendly fire, the lawyers said.

"This 'Dutch line' ... maintained close contact with The Hague, breaching U.N. command and control," Hagedorn told Reuters in an interview.

"It is a wrong idea that the Dutch soldiers were let down by the United Nations," Gerritsen added. "It was a decision by high ranking Dutch officers together with the Dutch state to see that requests for air support were denied."

Air support could have contained the Bosnian Serb forces and halted their advance, the lawyers said.

After requests for air support were initially granted by U.N officials the Dutch state did everything in its power to reverse this approval.

The lawyer argues that the U.N. is to blame for not trying to convince the Dutch that air support could not be recalled.

The Dutch government led by Wim Kok resigned in 2002 after a report on the massacre blamed politicians for sending the Dutch U.N. troops on an impossible mission.

However attempts by the families to seek compensation from the Dutch government were refused as the government denied any question of liability, the lawyers said, adding that the U.N. had also failed to respond to the families.