



Karadzic is playing politics

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By Rachel Levy -

Radovan Karadzic has turned his war crimes trial into a political soapbox because the former Bosnian Serb leader does not have a legal case, according to an attorney representing family members of the victims of the 1995 Srebrenica massacre. "Other than claim immunity or try to stall the trial, there is not much he can do, legally. There is too much evidence against him," Axel Hagedorn said yesterday. Hagedorn and his partner Marco Gerritsen at the Amsterdam-based law firm Van Diepen Van der Kroef represent some 6,000 women who lost relatives in the Srebrenica massacre.

Bosnian Serb forces are accused of killing around 8,000 Muslims in one week in July 1995 in the Muslim enclave, which at the time had been declared a United Nations safe area. The so-called Mothers of Srebrenica are seeking compensation from the Dutch state and the United Nations for failing to prevent the killings, despite the presence of 400 armed Dutch peacekeepers. The Srebrenica massacre is one of the crimes Karadzic is standing trial for at the International Criminal Tribunal for former Yugoslavia (ICTY).

"The Mothers of Srebrenica are very pleased Karadzic is finally facing justice," Hagedorn said. "Some women who attended the hearing said he is exactly the mean and horrible man they had expected," the lawyer said. Karadzic turned his opening statement into a political speech about the alleged suffering of Bosnian Serbs at the hands of Muslim extremists. And Hagedorn said such words were directed at his domestic audiences, rather than at the judges.

"There is a lot of tension building up in Bosnia, which could even lead to civil war again. Karadzic has a flawless intuition to make use of this. He is not addressing the court, nor the world, but people in Bosnia and Serbia," he said.

The German-born attorney said Karadzic's decision to represent himself at the Hague-based court was also designed to maintain his almost mythical war hero image among Serbs. "He sells himself as a martyr," he said. "Karadzic presents himself as the father of Serbia and simultaneously addresses rightist populist Serbs; the old establishment which protect Ratko Mladic," the infamous former Bosnian Serb general who is still being sought in the Hague. The attorney said it was possible that "we will never see Mladic again, because the euro-minded Serbs fear speaking up." "They don't want to risk being killed," he said, referring to the March 12, 2003 assassination of pro-Western Serb Prime Minister Zoran Djindjic, who was found dead shortly after handing former Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic over to UN prosecutors.