



# PHYSICIANS *for* HUMAN RIGHTS

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## **Forensic Monitoring Project Report Drina River and Gornji Džestje, Gorazde 26-29 August 1997**

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### **Findings**

#### Summary of Events:

Between 26-29 August 1997, Forensic Pathologists from the Tuzla Clinical Center and members of the Gorazde Police exhumed 3 sites along the Drina River and one burnt house in Gornji Džestje. Four bodies were recovered from the Drina loci and a Minimum Number of 2 Individuals were recovered from the Gornji Džestje locus. Two of the individuals recovered from a site on the East bank of the Drina had been wrapped in plastic and were extremely well preserved; the cause of death for both of these individuals was a single gunshot wound to the head. The other two bodies from Drina River loci were completely skeletonized and died of multiple gunshot wounds to the pelvis and chest.

#### Site Description Overview:

Four separate locations were exhumed between 26-29 August 1997 by the Gorazde Police and the Tuzla Clinical Center Forensic Pathologists. Three of the locations were isolated graves containing a total of four bodies recovered from along the East and West banks of the Drina River between Vitkovici and Ustikolina; one location, Gornji Džestje, was a burnt house high in the mountains off the Ustikolina-Sarajevo road.

The Drina River locales consisted of sandy-silty river bank deposits. The burials were some 1-2 meters deep. At one location with two bodies on the East bank of the Drina, preservation was excellent due to the bodies having been wrapped in plastic sheeting prior to burial in 1992. At the other two locations on the West bank of the Drina, the remains were completely skeletonized.

At Gornji Džestje, the house was burnt to its cement block foundation and poured concrete floor. A rubble layer with sparse vegetation covered the interior of the house. This was followed stratigraphically by a layer of broken ceramic roofing tiles. A layer of dense black wood-charcoal lay underneath the tiles. The skeletal remains, located in the bottom layer under the charcoal, were highly fragmentary and in extremely friable condition. Most of the remains could be seen in outline, but disintegrated upon removal.

#### History Relating to the Mass Grave:

All four bodies from the Drina River localities were found washed ashore in 1992 by local inhabitants living between Vitkovici and Ustikolina. These four, like many others found and identified previously in the Gorazde area, are presumed to be from Foca, upstream to the South. Witnesses report that in 1992 individuals were taken to the bridge in Foca, shot and their bodies thrown into the Drina.

The burnt house at Gornji Džestje was reported to contain the remains of 10 individuals who had been shot, brought to that house, and then set afire in 1992.

#### Exhumation Process:

The expert team used scythes to clear brush from the Drina River sites, shovels to dig the graves, and when the bodies were visible, they used trowels to define the articulated remains fully. In the case of the two bodies wrapped in plastic, a soil probe was used to locate the exact position of the bodies on the river bank; initially, some difficulty was encountered as the graves were deeper than expected on two terraces up the East river bank.

At Gornji Džestje, the team cleared the vegetation by hand and disposed of the overlying rubble layer. When the surface was clean, they excavated with trowels and paint brushes. All soil matrix (including the charcoal) was transported by bucket to be screened and checked for bone fragments.

#### Summary of Autopsy Findings:

The two bodies wrapped in plastic from the East bank of the Drina were an adult male some 180-186 cm in height and a 45-60 year old female some 165 cm in height (height of the corpse was measured directly). The cause of death for both individuals was a single gunshot wound to the head. The hands and feet of the male had been bound with wire.

The two bodies recovered from separate locations on the West bank of the Drina were a male and female; cause of death is unknown for either. The male exhibited well-healed but angulated fractures of the left tibia and fibula and of the right femur. An infectious process was active at the site of left tibia/fibula fractures.

At Gornji Džestje, cause of death was indeterminate. The identifiable remains leading to the estimation of a Minimum Number of Two Individuals consisted of: 2 right zygomatics, 2 fragments of the

right supraorbital margin, 2 mental eminences, 2 medial epicondyles of the right humerus, 2 left occipital articular facets of the atlas, 2 right distal fibulae, and 2 right and 2 left petrous portions of the temporal.

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