

## THE CENTER FOR JUSTICE & ACCOUNTABILITY

588 Sutter Street, No. 433  
San Francisco, CA 94102

t.) 415.544.0444  
f.) 415.544.0456

### PRESS RELEASE

CONTACT:

Raylene Samson, CJA  
# 415.307.3535 cell phone  
# 415.544.0444 San Francisco

Ann Burroughs, Amnesty International/USA  
# 310.815.0450 x238

Debbie Seagraves, ACLU of Georgia  
# 404.523.6201

#### SUIT FILED AGAINST SERB RESIDING IN THE ATLANTA AREA, ACCUSED OF TORTURE AND ACTS OF GENOCIDE

*- US should not be safe haven for torturers -*

#### **EMBARGOED UNTIL AUGUST 27, 9:30 a.m. EST**

*Atlanta –*

The Center for Justice and Accountability (CJA), joined by the ACLU of Georgia and private human rights attorneys, today announced the filing of a lawsuit in the United States District Court in Atlanta seeking damages against Nicola Vuckovic, who was allegedly responsible for torture and other atrocities at detention facilities in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Plaintiff Kemal Mehinovic claims that Vuckovic (also known as Nikola Nikolac), who is now residing in the Atlanta area, was responsible for beating and terrorizing him and others during the six month period following the April 1992 Bosnian Serb military takeover of Bosanski Samac in northern Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The lawsuit is filed under the Alien Tort Claims Act and the Torture Victim Protection Act, which provide jurisdiction in U.S. courts over claims brought against human rights violators found within the borders of the United States. Mr. Mehinovic's lawsuit

alleges that Vuckovic committed acts of genocide, war crimes, torture and other forms of cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment during a Serbian campaign of "ethnic cleansing" in 1992.

The lawsuit is the first such legal action against a Serbian defendant living in the United States. "There are far too many perpetrators of torture and war crimes who live in, or travel to, the United States," said CJA Executive Director, Gerald Gray. "This case represents is the first of many lawsuits by CJA aimed at closing off the United States to those responsible for committing such heinous human rights violations."

Mr. Mehinovic, a Bosnian Muslim, was arrested at his home after the Serb takeover of Bosanski Samac in April 1992 and detained first at police headquarters and then at a military warehouse along with hundreds of other Bosnian Muslim and Croat detainees. After being arbitrarily detained and tortured for six months in detention facilities in his hometown, Mr. Mehinovic was transferred to Batkovic concentration camp in nearby Bijeljina, and later to two additional detention facilities at Vlasenica and Han Pjesak.

The complaint alleges that Vuckovic beat the plaintiff and other "non-Serbs" with metal pipes, a baseball bat and chair legs while assaulting them with ethnic slurs. The plaintiff and other detainees received little food and water and nearly starved to death during their captivity. Sometimes detainees received pieces of bread smeared with pork fat, a food prohibited by Muslim tradition.

The lawsuit focuses on Mr. Mehinovic's treatment, but these allegations reflect the kinds of acts committed against thousands of his fellow Muslim and Croat residents of northern Bosnia starting in the spring of 1992 and were by no means isolated acts. The complaint describes the overall context of the "ethnic cleansing" campaign that was responsible for the specific violations that Mr. Mehinovic suffered.

This lawsuit is the first filed by The Center for Justice & Accountability. CJA was created earlier this year with the assistance of Amnesty International-USA, to pursue human rights violators and war criminals found in the United States by facilitating legal action authorized under United States law. CJA is committed to undertaking lawsuits that will prevent the United States from serving as a "safe haven" for these violators and to achieving a measure of justice for the victims of these violations.

Press Packets and copies of the Complaint will be available at the press conference.

Press conference participants:

**Gerald Gray**, CJA's founder and Executive Director and a Board Member of Survivors International, a San Francisco torture treatment center.

**Shawn Roberts**, CJA's Legal Director.

**Paul Hoffman**, a private human rights lawyer working on the case and Chair of the Board of Amnesty International/USA.

**Gerald Weber**, attorney for the ACLU of Georgia.

Other attorneys on the case include Professor Ralph Steinhardt, Chair of the Board of CJA, etc.