

UN tribunal jails Kosovo Albanian

A UN court in The Hague has jailed the first Kosovo Albanian to be convicted of war crimes committed during the conflict with Serbian forces in 1998.

Haradin Bala received a 13-year jail term for torture and murder at a prison camp run by the Kosovo Liberation Army. His alleged commander, Fatmir Limaj, and co-accused Isak Musliu were cleared of all charges and ordered to be freed.

The UN court was set up to try war crimes and crimes against humanity from the wars in the former Yugoslavia.

Several Serbs, Croats and Bosnian Muslims have already been jailed by the court.

Serbian politicians have often accused the tribunal of failing to properly prosecute alleged war crimes by Kosovo Albanians.

Mr Limaj, Mr Musliu and Haradin Bala were the first Kosovo Albanians to be indicted.

Thousands of people marched through the streets of Kosovo's capital, Pristina, this week to proclaim the innocence of the three.

Protests first erupted after the men were arrested in early 2003 and there were fears guilty verdicts would spark fresh unrest in Kosovo.

Executing prisoners

Prosecutors had accused the three men of detaining 35 people - including Serbs and alleged Albanian collaborators - in the camp, where they were subjected to torture and inhumane conditions.

The three were also accused of executing several prisoners as they fled a Serb assault on the Lapusnik region.

The presiding judge, Kevin Parker, said the prosecution had successfully proven the existence of a prison camp at Lapusnik, near Pristina.

The judge said Bala's presence at the camp had been proven beyond any doubt, but there was not enough evidence to link Mr Limaj and Mr Musliu to the crimes committed there.

Final status talks

Three more Kosovo Albanians have since been indicted, including the former Prime Minister and guerrilla commander, Ramush Haradinaj, who is currently awaiting trial.

The Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) conducted a guerrilla war against Serbian targets accused of launching a crackdown on the province's ethnic Albanian community.

A 78-day Nato air campaign in 1999 drove Serbian forces out of the province.

Kosovo has since been administered by the United Nations and Nato, though it technically remains a province of Serbia.

The area's Albanian majority wants full independence - but Belgrade has said it must remain part of Serbia.

The UN envoy to the province has said talks on the future of the province must begin soon.



Thousands marched in Kosovo in support of the three accused men



Kosovo Albanian guerrillas battled Serbian forces until Nato intervened