

Envoy warns of genocide in Bosnia

by EIR Staff

The French daily *Le Figaro* on Sept. 22 published an interview with Spain's José-María Mendiluce, special envoy in ex-Yugoslavia for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, and the first official to issue public warnings about the Serbians' practice of "ethnic cleansing" this past spring. Across the top of page two, *Le Figaro* headlined, "Bosnia: 400,000 Civilians Threatened with Death," and sub-headlined that the UNHCR envoy was launching a "cry of alarm" at a time when "cold weather risks killing civilians trapped by war and deprived of everything."

The interview was preceded by the kicker: "Without help, they will not survive the winter."

Le Figaro noted that "at 41 years of age, José-María Mendiluce has, behind him, 14 years of humanitarian missions, in Africa, in South America, in Afghanistan or in Kurdistan. But it is in the heart of Europe, in Bosnia-Herzegovina, that the special envoy of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees says he has confronted the worst. In the Serbian camps, he says, they are continuing to assassinate children, women, and the elderly. As winter approaches, death is stalking 400,000 civilians trapped by the war and deprived of everything. And the exodus of more than 2 million refugees is a bomb which threatens all of Europe."

In the interview, Mendiluce said, of the situation in Bosnia-Herzegovina as winter approaches, that "in the north of Bosnia," which is controlled by the Serbs, ". . . we fear that the conflict is further intensifying," with 1.8 million refugees at the present time.

As for deaths, Mendiluce said, "I have the impression that there are still more deaths" than the official 60,000 reported by the government in Sarajevo, "especially in the regions which are outside the control of the Bosnian government. In addition to the bombardments and the massacres, the winter, which is very harsh in Bosnia, will be a factor of still further destructiveness."

A race against winter

Mendiluce was asked about the conditions of those remaining in Bosnia, who have not been able to flee. He said

that some 400,000 persons there are in danger of death, "isolated, without food, without medicines, without anything even to build shelters. If it is impossible to bring them help, they will not survive the winter."

To assist the Bosnians, Mendiluce said the U.N. needs to provide three times more than the 250 trucks currently in Bosnia, both to protect convoys and to distribute supplies. "The city of Sarajevo alone now needs 250 tons of food each day. For the center of the country [Tuzla, Gorazde], the needs rise to more than 5,000 tons per week. It is impossible to quantify the needs in terms of medicine. That ranges from syringes to blankets for the winter." He warned that the situation is "a race against the winter. The deployment of the supplementary troops of the U.N. has already been delayed."

Turning to the Bosnian refugees, who, he said, total some 4,000-5,000 persons fleeing per day, Mendiluce predicted that "perhaps 1 million more refugees . . . will take flight, because of the war, the persecutions, and the cold weather." These refugees are passing through Croatia bound for other European countries. "Europe," he declared, "must prepare itself for an enormous effort of assistance: If a million Bosnians, hungry and weakened, bring themselves to our frontiers, it is not the customs officers who will stop them. From here until the end of the year, Europe risks being invaded by the refugees from ex-Yugoslavia."

'Civilians are the sport of the battle'

Mendiluce was also asked about the Serbian camps, which were visited by the Red Cross after international publicity spotlighted mistreatment of prisoners. Mendiluce confirmed that there is "irrefutable proof that six or seven camps continue to 'function,' where they assassinate the elderly, women, and children. It is terrible to say, but we are no longer surprised to discover such crimes. All the belligerents have ended up resorting to them; it is a sort of chain reaction: The civilians are the sport of the battle." He expressed hope that several thousand detainees will be transferred to Croatia next week.

Further documenting the atrocities, Mendiluce told *Le Figaro*, "Here, civilians are arrested in order to exchange them for other civilians; cities and hospitals are attacked with heavy artillery and tanks. They have no respect for people, including those who bring humanitarian aid. Certain of my colleagues have been arrested, beaten, stripped and, even, in the Red Cross, killed. I heard militiamen justify massacres of children, by explaining that 'we have to prevent them from killing our own children tomorrow.'"

As the conflict threatens to extend southward toward the region of Kosovo, Mendiluce said that the same "ferment" exists in Kosovo and in the Sandjak, a Muslim-majority region in southern Serbia, as well as in Vojvodina, a Hungarian ethnic-majority region in northern Serbia. He grimly predicted that "we have to prepare for the worst."