

ANNEX 154:
WITNESS STATEMENT OF FRANJO KOŽUL

Croat, born on 1948 in Turčinović, region of Široki Brijeg, he worked as a workman, lived in Vukovar, now in Zagreb.

TESTIMONY

I was captured in Vukovar as a member of the civilian protection, in the center of the city. The representatives of Vukovar city had negotiations with the former JNA (Yugoslav People's Army). Also doctor Vesna Bosanac and Marin Vidić-Bili took part in those negotiations. They agreed that the town would surrender, and people would be free to go where ever they wanted, at least that was what they said to us, to us who gathered in the building of Vukovar's hospital, and we came from all shelters in the city, because we thought that we would have better chances to survive if we were together. Doctor Bosanac said that the buses for us were in Vukovar's hospital at that moment in the evening, doctor Bosanac came, and she told us that we should go back to our shelters, because as she said they (the army) had a list of all shelters in the city and it was agreed that they would come with buses in front of every shelter, but at that time the Chetniks had already started to occupy the city, and had occupied some parts. We considered that suggestion stupid, and we didn't do that, but we stayed in the hospital building till the representative came, and that was the commander of the former Yugoslav People's Army – major Šljivančanin, who said: "You will go to a gathering center in the shelter of "Velepromet", and first mothers with children and older people will be separated from the others." In that moment we knew that they had cheated us. We knew that because no one from International Red Cross and European Community observers who were in Vukovar then came to see us. The transport began. They took us to the warehouse of "Velepromet" and into the courtyard of cooperative "Vupik", Vukovar that was across "Velepromet". I didn't see that anyone was tortured, maltreated or killed in the hospital area, but I saw a large group of local men in front of the hospital building, and they were dressed in different uniforms, and with Chetnik's marks. They just threatened us, but no one was hurt. I knew lots of them, because they worked and lived with us till then. I was taken into the courtyard I mentioned before, together with a group of men and women, and they separated women on one side and men on the other at once. There were different men in that courtyard, dressed in different uniforms, and most of them were local men, who used flash-lights to recognize who they knew from our group, and they took out men by a criterion only they knew. DARKO FOT, a local Chetnik whose father was a Croat, took me and a few more men out of the group. They took my group into the courtyard of "Velepromet". There I saw lots of local Serbs in different uniforms, and all of them took out and separated men, and took them in, for me, an unknown direction. There were lots of women and girls among them, also in uniforms, and they did what all of them did. I knew all of them by sight, and the worst were INKA STANKOVIĆ, daughter of ex director of Vukovar's radio and her husband VLADO KOSIĆ, then wife of ZDRAVKO ČUK who was also in uniform, then NADA from the perfume shop and lots of others that I didn't know by name. MIĆO ĐANKOVIĆ, ex waiter from Vukovar, a man who was known as a criminal even before the war, and was in prison as a murderer, that man took me and some men out of the group. During that time there was chaos. I could hear shots, people screamed and sobbed, I could hear hits, beating, and the worst scene was a Chetnik who held a head that was cut off in one hand and a knife covered with blood in the other. His name is MIRKO, and they called him ČAPALO. I knew that

man well, he was a gambler and vagabond before the war, he had a tendency to violence. After a while, BORO ZNANOVIC took me and another man from the group. He took us out to the dark, and since I knew him, I asked him: "Boro, where are you taking us?", and he said: "Be quiet, I am taking you to a safe place, tonight it will be rough here." He took us in front of one building, it was the joiner's workshop of "Velepromet". There was one tall Chetnik, half drunk, he was searching two men in front of us. I saw a big pile of money, and under the table was an even bigger pile of different documents. When it was my turn, he asked me to give him my documents. I gave him my wallet, he took my coat off, and my leather jacket, and I was only in a shirt, and he did all that with that other man who was with me. He opened an iron door of the workshop, and pushed us in. There I saw about 50 people, they were scared, and they were different people by nationality and occupation. I heard from those people that they called that building "the cell of death". They brought some men after me, one policeman-B.I., from Šarengrad, MIĆO ĐANKOVIĆ hit him over face with a gun and cut him. After that they threw in one young man, both of his legs were shot through. After some time ĐANKOVIĆ came into the room again and took out policeman B., we knew nothing of him after that. After a while the door was opened again, and one drunk Chetnik came with an automatic gun in his hands, and he said: "At 9 o'clock, no, at half past 9 you will go for execution." I don't know when after that, but the door was opened again, but that was not the same man from before, it was an older man in uniform, he was a major. As he entered, he said: "Get up men." You can imagine how we felt after all we had gone through, how frightened we were. We knew that it was the end. But, the major said: "Hold your hands, two by two, put your heads down, and get out slowly, there's a bus postponed. We entered the bus, he ordered the bus driver to drive the bus behind the military vehicle, and to start going towards Negotslavci. That was done. I saw 9 buses behind us. At one point during the night, we started. Through Negotslavci and Šid we arrived in Sremska Mitrovica. We stopped between the military barracks and the penitentiary. We stayed there till the morning. As the morning came, lots of different people started to gather around us. Some of them were in civilian clothes, and most of them in uniforms, they called themselves "volunteers", and they would come in the buses, offend our people any way they could, they would beat us with everything they had.

Three men entered the bus where I was, they asked our names, they beat all of us with wooden sticks. They broke one of those sticks on one of us. Some time during the day, they took us to a racecourse in Sremska Mitrovica, there they allowed us to do a call of nature, and we received some water, but all the time they had their guns pointed at us. In the evening we started again, towards Novi Sad, we passed it, drove through Bačka, and came to Zrenjanin. During the occupation in Vukovar, I had heard that a camp for people from Vukovar had been established in Zrenjanin. What I had heard came true. We passed through Zrenjanin, and drove for about 10 more kilometers, and when we arrived on one deserted farm, we stopped. There were lots of people, in different uniforms, civilians, military police. The buses stopped in front of one stable. As we entered the stable, we had to pass through cordon of men who beat us with everything, the cordon was about 30 meters long. They ordered me to make a list of people that were there, so I knew the number, I made a list of 1242 people, in alphabetical order. After some time I found out that in another stable were 480 men. They were offending us, beat us, maltreated us, and they called one of those stable "Maksimir", and the other one "Poljud". During the first few days we were sitting and sleeping one over the other, on bare concrete. They would give us some water, one little slice of bread and some cheese, twice a day, and they beat us and tortured us 24 hours a day. I cannot describe all kinds of physical and psychological tortures, I would never imagine that people we lived with, and worked with would do that crime. Till the time we arrived into the stables they beat us where ever they could. They

beat me over my back, and since I was sitting on the right side of the bus, they beat me also over my legs, and I still have consequences. They also beat us over the genitals, and they tortured us the most till the arrival of the International Red Cross, which happened on December 4, 1991. Since that time people died from beating, and the tortures went on and on. I know that from beating 9 men died, among them Ivica Kamerla and Branko Koh. As I said, the Red Cross came and they made a list of all of us, and they gave us our camp number. After that killing stopped, but tortures, psychological and physical continued. One way of psychological torturing was that we had to sing the Yugoslav hymn, every morning and every night, and Chetnik's songs every time our guards, military police men, wanted. What was the worst for me, it's known to every prisoner, was: "Head down and hands on back". We had to be like that all the time, when we went to toilet, lunch, breakfast, dinner, questioning, we had to sit like that where they put us. The questioning started. We were taken there in some order and priority they made. I think that they thought they had captured the biggest cut-throats and Ustashes in Vukovar, and that they had done something "big". But, in fact, that were mostly civilians, from 11 to 90 years of age. Majority of us received a beating before or after questioning, as much as the examiner wanted. They tried to accuse us of actions that never took place, not in Vukovar or anywhere else. As I understood, they wanted to accuse us of what they did. They didn't treat all of us the same, some of us went only once for questioning, and some of us a few times. First people that were released from that camp, it was called STAJIĆEVO, were mostly Serbs that were among us, and people from mixed marriages, and other nationalities, and it is known that in Vukovar that was 22% of them. They searched the most for Herzegovinians, I think because they were afraid of them, they called them "blackshirts". God forbid that you had anything black on you and if you were Herzegovinian.

They searched us, took all we had, specially foreign money, and they said that they would give it back, but they never did. As they searched us, we had to come in front of the camera, and tell our data, and from where in Vukovar we were. They forced us several times to write an appeal to the president and the Republic of Croatia, because, as they said, our government had abandoned us, and did not need us, but we knew that it wasn't true, and we never signed. In the meantime, they released a few minor groups of people, and the first exchange was when they released 110 members of the Croatian police that were with us. Before us, they released all medical staff also, although we needed them because of the terrible conditions we lived in. Bad food, water full of sulfur, and great cold. When the International Red Cross visited us, I asked one of the translators, he was a black man, if he had ever seen a camp that has been worst than this one, and he said: "I have seen all camps, and I saw only one worst than this, it was in Bangladesh, and believe me, it had to be closed down". There was barbed wire all around the camp, guards everywhere, just like those camps from World War II. On December 24, 1991 they ordered us to clean the camp. Some people thought that we would be set free, but probably, because of the pressure that World's public opinion put on them, the camp had to be closed. They took us to Sremska Mitrovica, and to military prison in Niš. They had alphabetical order, and those who were up to letter "R" went to Sremska Mitrovica, and those from "R" to "Š" to Niš. As we arrived in Mitrovica, we saw men from Vukovar, from Mitnica. From Stajicevo also arrived military policemen and examiners, a few days after us. The questioning started again. I went for questioning 6 times. Every week-end since I arrived, Serbs from Vukovar would come, they would get lists with our names from the penitentiary's management, and they would call out whomever they wanted. They beat us the most. They called me twice. MILE TURUKALO and JOVANOVIĆ whose nickname was BOGA, and with whom I was a friend before the war, they called me first time, they stayed in Vukovar with our people till the end, but when Vukovar fell, they joined the "other side". They were saying some

information about me, that I was one of the establishers of the HDZ (Croatian Democratic Union), that I had on my head a big chess symbol (symbol of Croatia), so they searched my house, and they said that they found that symbol there which was not true. Second time when I was called, my neighbor and man I worked with did it. His name is VESELIN PETROVIĆ, and with him was GRUJO AMIDŽIĆ, whom I saw for the first time, and whose name I found out later. They said that I wanted to take away from them their flat, and they asked me who worked in headquarters, they said that I shot Serbs and the army, although I told them that since November 19, 1991 there was no army in Vukovar. They beat me for 3 hours, with rubber sticks, fists and legs. There was a young man with me, and they beat him too, because AMIDŽIĆ was his neighbor. I saw the results of beating when I came back to my room and when I took off my clothes, I was black all over the body, only not over the head, although PETROVIĆ hit me over the face several times. I had an operation on my hip in Vukovar, and because of beating in the bus, and on Mitnica, I was forced to have an operation on the left hip, as a matter of fact, they had to make me a new hip. I had that operation in Zagreb, on November 26, 1992, at Šalata Clinic. I was exchanged on March 27, 1992, as a member of the Croatian Army, although I was not a member, but they ordered me to say that because of the exchange. This is one part of suffering we went through from Vukovar to freedom. I have said only a little part of what I went through, because people that were with me, and who stayed there till September went through even worst tortures. In my opinion it would be very good to hear everything from me and the others, without adding or taking away anything, to hear the truth about us, the truth about people we know nothing about, and among them is my son also, fighter from Vukovar from the first day, and to put the end of that. There is a suspicion that on occupied territories are camps, that there are our people who have to work there or are taken to the front fighting line, and also there is a suspicion about mass graves and murders after Vukovar fell.

With signature on every page of this testimony I confirm its authenticity, and that it was given without any coercion.

In Zagreb, March 29, 1993

Statement was given by: Franjo Kožul