Bosnia peace overseer blasts Serbs on warcrimes

Bosnia peace overseer blasts Serbs on warcrimes

By Nedim Dervisbegovic

SARAJEVO, June 26 (Reuters) – Bosnia's top peace overseer warned Bosnian Serb leaders on Tuesday to swiftly improve their "scandalous" level of cooperation with the U.N. war crimes tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. Referring to the authorities' failure to arrest suspects sought by The Hague tribunal, Wolfgang Petritsch told Reuters: "This is outrageous. Definitely the way this government is behaving in regard to the cooperation with The Hague is scandalous." Most of the suspects, indicted for war crimes committed during the bloody breakup of the former Yugoslavia, are thought to be hiding in Bosnia's Serb republic, where the majority of the alleged crimes took place during the 1992-95 war. More than 20 Bosnian Serbs are in the court's custody, but they were mostly snatched by NATO-led peacekeepers. Some of them surrendered voluntarily and others were handed over by Yugoslavia. The Bosnian Serb authorities have arrested none.

Western diplomats have repeatedly told the government that they must start cooperating with the tribunal, including arresting war crimes suspects, but have so far not used sanctions to force them to do so. The international community deliberately tries to deliberately tries to direct aid via Bosnia's central authorities to foster unity in the divided country, making it hard to sanction the Serb Republic alone. Petritsch, who has sweeping powers to remove officials seen as obstructive, declined to say in the interview whether he was considering taking action against the Bosnian Serb leaders. In neighbouring Yugoslavia, the government pushed through a decree at the weekend formalising cooperation with the

tribunal and the procedure for handing over suspects. Mladen Ivanic, the prime minister of the Serb Republic which makes up Bosnia together with the Muslim-Croat federation, told Reuters on Sunday that his government would present a draft law on cooperation with the tribunal within the next 10 days. But Petritsch said the law was not necessary because the 1995 Dayton peace treaty obliged all sides to cooperate with the tribunal without any conditions. “This is a very serious situation. They will have to change it very fast,” he said. He acknowledged there had been some progress but said it was “definitely not enough”. The tribunal believes that 26 of the 38 suspects it has indicted are hiding in the republic. But Mirko Sarovic, the republic’s nationalist president, denied in a recent newspaper interview that war crimes suspects were in the territory.

Bosnia peace overseer blasts Serbs on warcrimes