

Admits Sarajevo massacre

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Senior official admits to secret U.N. report on Sarajevo massacre

New York

For the first time, a senior U.N. official has admitted the existence of a secret U.N. report that blames the Bosnian Moslems for the February 1994 massacre of Moslems at a Sarajevo market.

Yasushi Akashi, the Undersecretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and the former head of the U.N. mission in Bosnia, told the German Press Agency dpa that the secret report is "no secret."

An international outcry over the massacre, in which 68 civilians perished at Markale marketplace, led directly to a toughening of Western policy towards the Serbs, who were widely blamed for the incident.

But there have been persistent rumours at the United Nations ever since that a U.N. report clearly blamed the Moslems for firing on their own people in order to create international sympathy and get the West to fight on their side against the Serbs.

Until Thursday, U.N. officials strongly denied the report existed, even after it was quoted in press reports.

Akashi told dpa that not only did the first report exist, but that some journalists already had a copy. He said the details were in a 1995 story by U.S. journalist David Binder, who quoted from the confidential report.

According to Binder, the report said U.N. peacekeepers were prevented by Moslem police from entering the site in the aftermath of the explosion. No doctors were allowed on the scene and the 197 victims were carried away to hospital within 25 minutes.

After studying the crater left by the mortar shell and the distribution of the shrapnel, the report concluded that the shell was fired from behind Moslem lines. U.N. monitors reported no Serbian shelling that day from points near the marketplace.

The official U.N. report that was subsequently released said the evidence as to who fired the shell was inconclusive, since it originated from an area where Moslem and Serb lines were very close. The two reports represented divergent views, but the United Nations chose to publish the neutral report and keep the other secret.

The incident led to a NATO ultimatum to Bosnian Serbs to withdraw their heavy weapons from around Sarajevo.

At the time, Madeleine Albright, the U.S. ambassador to the U.N., said: "It's very hard to believe any country would do this to their own people, and therefore, although we do not exactly know what the facts are, it would seem to us that the Serbs are the ones that probably have a great deal of responsibility."