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Vancouver Bosnian calls for air strikes; [FINAL Edition]

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Abstract (Summary)

The weekend carnage in Sarajevo shows why United Nations' air strikes are needed to end the violence in the former Yugoslavia, Vancouver Bosnian community leader Dr. Mel Dilli said Monday.

Canada must take in more refugees as Prime Minister Jean Chretien promised to do before he was elected, Dilli said. "Only about 2,000 Bosnians have been allowed in so far," he said. "I hope to see Mr. Chretien again in the next few weeks."

Dilli, who came to Canada 20 years ago, is the local chair of the World Movement for Peace in Bosnia, which opened a centre on Burrard Street in November. The group is trying to bring 137 refugees, most of them widowed women and children, from Portugal, where they are living in the streets in poverty. Since the war started two years ago, about 180 Bosnians have come to Vancouver, Dilli said.

Full Text (480 words)

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The weekend carnage in Sarajevo shows why United Nations' air strikes are needed to end the violence in the former Yugoslavia, Vancouver Bosnian community leader Dr. Mel Dilli said Monday.

Dilli said international leaders lack the political will to use the necessary force to stop attacks such as the one that killed 68 people in a Sarajevo market area Saturday.

"We are pleading with the whole world for peace," Dilli said.

"The authorities know what to do to effectively bring peace in southeast Europe If the UN and NATO effectively move in in a forceful fashion, there would be peace in no time."

Dilli, a psychiatrist, said local Bosnians were stunned as they watched news reports on the weekend massacre. "It was atrocious, atrocious, unbelievable, terrible," he said.

Reports say most of those killed were Muslims and the attackers are believed to be Serbs positioned in the hills around Sarajevo.

"Fifty years after what happened to innocent Jews in Warsaw ghettos, now it's happening all over again and there is no excuse," Dilli said.

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The Canadian government would still prefer a negotiated settlement to end the fighting in the former Yugoslavia, Foreign Affairs Minister Andre Ouellet said Monday after a speech to the Montreal Council on Foreign Relations.

NATO allies will meet this week, probably Wednesday, to discuss a tougher effort to get the warring factions back to the bargaining table, he said. "An air strike is the very last resort," Ouellet said. "And indeed, we prefer a negotiated settlement to the use of additional military forces."

"I hope that common sense will prevail and the parties will accept the only ultimate solution, which is a negotiated peace."

About 2,000 Canadian soldiers are serving in the former Yugoslavia, the majority of them in Bosnia.

An air strike could not only imperil the Canadian troops, it could also end their delivery of humanitarian aid and protection of civilians in Muslim enclaves, Ouellet said.

In Ottawa, Chretien expressed a similar concern over calls for air strikes. "Of course, the situation is very, very bad there. We will see in the next few days what the best action is we can take," Chretien told the Commons.

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