



Overview of the Situation of Ethnic Minorities in Kosovo (3 November 1999)

A. Introduction

1. This brief overview highlights the latest developments and trends in the minority¹ protection area that have emerged since the release of the second joint report on the situation of ethnic minorities in Kosovo, published by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)² on 6 September 1999.³

2. The overall situation of ethnic minorities in Kosovo remains precarious. While the crime statistics released by the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) in mid-October⁴ indicate a decline in the overall number of violent incidents as far as minorities are concerned, this may be due in part to the fact that there has been a significant decrease in the overall non-Albanian population over the past four months.⁵ Informed observers agree that there is a climate of violence and impunity, as well as widespread discrimination, harassment and intimidation directed against non-Albanians. The combination of security concerns, restricted movement, lack of access to public services (especially education, medical/health care and pensions) are the determining factors in the departure of Serbs, primarily, and other non-Albanian groups from Kosovo to date. While there have also been some return movements to Kosovo, these departures continue and seem unlikely to be reversed in the near future. This widespread disrespect for human rights has increasingly also affected moderate Albanians and those who are openly critical of the current violent environment.

3. The inter-agency Ad Hoc Task Force on Minorities, chaired by the DSRSG for Humanitarian Affairs, continues to meet weekly to co-ordinate action and to maximise the capabilities of the international community in Kosovo. Major challenges are to ensure

¹ Where the term "minority" is used in this document, it describes groups of persons who are in a numerical minority situation in a particular location, regardless of their status elsewhere in a country or province.

² This joint UNHCR/OSCE monitoring and reporting initiative is the result of action taken by the Ad Hoc Task Force on Minorities chaired by the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General (DSRSG) for Humanitarian Affairs.

³ This overview should therefore be read in conjunction with this second report, as well as with the first joint report which constituted a preliminary overview of the situation of ethnic minorities in Kosovo covering events up to 19 July 1999.

⁴ Crime statistics during the past four months include 348 murders, 116 kidnappings, 1070 lootings, and 1106 arsons.

⁵ On 15 October 1999, the Yugoslav Red Cross and local authorities indicated that the total number of registered internally displaced persons from Kosovo in both Serbia and Montenegro stood at 230,884.

physical safety for all people of Kosovo, and in particular those in a minority situation, as well as to promote unhindered and non-discriminatory access of minorities to food, health care, education and other public services. Creative methods for increasing security and freedom of movement, and ensuring that minorities receive humanitarian distributions, health care, and education are being pursued by UNHCR, OSCE, the UN Civil Administration, KFOR, and other concerned agencies. The recent establishment of the first UNHCR bus lines, enabling minorities to travel out of their isolated communities, has been a particularly welcome initiative which will be expanded as conditions permit.

B. The wider Pristina area

4. The situation of minorities within the wider Pristina area during the last two months has been characterised by :

- a steady decline in the numbers of ethnic minorities (mainly Serbs and Roma);
- an increasing tendency towards concentration in mono-ethnic enclaves;
- continued isolation and restricted freedom of movement; and
- lack of access to public services -- especially education, medical/health care -- resulting in efforts to create “parallel” systems or activities in some areas.

5. In general, the lack of security for minorities in the urban centre has necessitated the continued flight of the minority population, while the semi-urban enclaves have provided some opportunities for minorities to remain in Kosovo, albeit with restricted movement and limited activities. In the rural villages where minorities are present, some minorities continue to depart. However it does appear that KFOR’s increased efforts to provide protection (especially through the deployment of permanent, static troops in many rural areas) have played a preventive role in security incidents and have given rural minorities more confidence.

6. In **urban Pristina**, while the reported number of human rights violations (murder, assault and battery, forced eviction, etc.) has steadily declined in the last few months, the recent murders of two Serbs illustrate the fragile situation. The decline in the frequency of incidents would appear to be directly related to the decreasing numbers of minorities present in the urban areas. Within the urban centre, it is estimated that only 400 to 600 Serbs remain. They do not enjoy any secure freedom of movement, and the majority of them are now isolated, housebound, and dependent upon humanitarian aid for food, hygienic items, and medical care. Many families remaining in Pristina are reportedly exploring ways to sell their property and find accommodation in Serbia, in order to ultimately leave as well.

7. There is only a scattering of Roma still left in the outskirts of Pristina town, and movements beyond their enclave are restricted. Even those gypsy populations who use Albanian language (Ashkalija) face intimidation and harassment in public places, which has effectively denied them access to markets, public transport and health facilities. Roma/Ashkalija children in the urban centres currently have no access to education.

8. Another significant minority population in urban Pristina, the Slavic Muslims, continue to face risks from speaking their native language (Serbo-Croatian) in public.⁶ Slavic Muslims have reported difficulties in such routine activities as shopping, and currently have access to neither employment (except with international organisations) nor education. (Many of their youth express a desire to leave Kosovo in order to complete their studies.) While there have not yet been significant movements of Slavic Muslim populations out of the Pristina area, it should be noted that their continued exclusion from mainstream society may leave many with no choice but to pursue a future outside of Kosovo.

9. In the greater Pristina area, in the town centres of **Gracanica** and **Kosovo Polje**, population movements are difficult to track, since it would appear that families moving to Serbia are often replaced by Serb families displaced from other areas, such as urban Pristina and Obilic. The populations in Gracanica and Kosovo Polje enjoy relative freedom of movement within their enclaves, and most people therefore have access to medical/health care, shops, social activities, etc. within their community. However they have limited access to jobs and economic opportunities. In Gracanica, the Serbs' lack of access to Pristina hospital facilities has led to an attempt to expand local health services, including upgrading ambulanta facilities to the level of regional health centres.

10. In the mixed area of Kosovo Polje, there continue to be occasional but very serious security incidents, such as the well-publicised bombing on 2 September of a Serb marketplace, resulting in two dead and 47 injured. Although the Roma/Ashkalija enclave in Kosovo Polje has not been the specific target of attacks, the population generally feels at risk within the community, and fears that their presence in a Serb majority area will jeopardise their ability to integrate in a majority-Albanian province in the future. For this reason, the gypsy enclave has resisted accessing public services such as health clinics.

11. In **Obilic**, the number of ethnic Serbs continues to diminish weekly, as the population has faced continued intimidation, forced eviction, and house burnings. The recent murder of an elderly Serb woman and the burning of her house in Obilic Town confirmed that gross human rights violations continue to be used to try to displace minority groups from the town area. On the village level, KFOR's presence in the majority Serb villages has helped to prevent outflows of the population.

12. The municipality of **Lipljan** has suffered from continued ethnic tensions in the last two months between the Albanian and Serb communities, although in recent weeks, the number of attacks against Serb persons and their property has decreased. During this period the primary security concern has been the use of hand-grenades against Serb property -- in some cases resulting in deaths. The Albanian community in Lipljan has reportedly been subject to intense pressures from within to refuse to serve Serbs. Such pressures have included the imposition of "fines" on businesses known to have sold goods to Serbs. On the political level, the primary conflicts between the ethnic communities have been related to the use of school facilities. Serbs in Lipljan Town have begun organising their own informal schools inside private residences, with KFOR's support for security. The situation of general insecurity has provoked the flight of a limited number of Serbs from Lipljan Town. The security situation of the gypsy population in Lipljan Town appears to be improving, and

⁶ A UN expatriate staff member was murdered in the centre of Pristina on 13 October, reportedly for replying to a question in Serbo-Croatian.

some Roma have stated that they have even begun to send their children to the Albanian school and to make use of the town health facility and pharmacy. Roma populations in rural Lipljan, however, continue to express frustration at their complete exclusion from social services and inability to travel safely beyond their villages.

13. The security of the Croat and Roma groups in **Janjevo** (Lipljan municipality) has remained relatively stable (with a significant and permanent KFOR presence in the town), and no incidents have been reported, aside from some verbal exchanges with Albanian townspeople. The main concern faced by this community is their long-term future, including access to education, economic opportunities, and the preservation of their language and cultural practices in a future Kosovo.

C. The wider Gnjilane area

14. In the Gnjilane area, the acute forms of pressure on minorities declined dramatically in late September and early October, with no reported abductions and a drastic reduction in the number of killings. The violence has not stopped, but has been more sporadic. KFOR reports that the rising trend is property crime, including looting and forced evictions. Reports up to mid-October from across the whole area were primarily of fears about the coming winter, deliveries of humanitarian aid to remote villages and the lack of access to medical services. Access to education is a key issue in Gnjilane, Kosovska Kamenica and Vitina. However, the events of the week from 17 to 24 October demonstrated that violent action is also still a reality: the village of Mogila in **Vitina** municipality was attacked by 5 rocket-propelled grenades on 19 October. In **Gnjilane**, there were 8 grenade attacks and two Serb-owned houses were set on fire. In Vrbovac and Grncar, mines were laid in maize fields that were about to be harvested by Kosovo Serbs. (Trip wires were used, hidden among the crops.)

15. The three root causes of violence remain the same: either activity directed at forcing minorities to leave the province, retaliation against those activities, or violence sparked by issues that bring the minority and majority populations into direct conflict. The abduction of two Serb teachers from Urosevac at the end of September, for example, resulted in a series of sometimes violent protests and the use of roadblocks in villages around Strpce. In Mogila, the flash-point for the recent spate of attacks seems to have been conflict over access to school facilities, though it cannot be ruled out that advantage has been taken of KFOR's transfer of troops out of Mogila to Gnjilane in response to the pattern of violence from June to September. In Gnjilane, the violence is once again directed at displacing Serbs and Roma from the town by direct attack or fear of attack.

16. The Gnjilane Church Board reports that from the standpoint of the Serbs, the level of fear and intimidation is no less than it was in June. The Church Board would prefer a more visible KFOR presence, as well as the use of at least some Serb interpreters by KFOR units in their area.

17. Not least because of systematic threats to their security, the Serb population in **Urosevac** Town now only consists of 28 mainly elderly individuals living under extremely difficult circumstances, and the Roma/Ashkalija communities continue to be subjected to harassment, intimidation, and house burnings.

D. The wider Prizren area (including Gora Municipality)

18. The wider Prizren area has been marked by intense violence, often directed at elderly Serbs and at Roma. In **Prizren**⁷, tensions are on the rise in the Roma communities, not least following the murder of a fifty year old Roma in Suva Reka in mid-October. Around the same period, two Roma reportedly went missing from Dushanova and two bodies, presumed to be Roma, were found.

19. With continued house burnings leading to the evacuation of the entire population of Zivinjane Village on 23 October, the situation in the Zupa area (Prizren municipality) has reached a crisis point. It has been suggested that immediate security measures, including permanent checkpoints, be put in place in this area -- and in particular in the village of Bogosevac -- to prevent further evacuations, injuries, and deaths. An elderly man was murdered at the end of September in Zivinjane, people continue to be harassed and houses continue to be burned. Most of the people evacuated on 23 October were elderly with no relatives, and thus have little chance of finding a housing solution outside of the Prizren Seminary.

20. Suva Reka has been relatively quiet, while **Gora**, where a large Slavic Muslim community lives, has experienced general harassment and sporadic acts of violence. Coupled with the activity in neighbouring areas, this has raised tension and put pressure on the Slavic Muslim community. In September, the schooling issue exposed some splits both between Slavic Muslims and Albanians, and within the Slavic Muslim community itself, the main disputes being access to education and linguistic rights. Those Slavic Muslims who identified themselves as Albanian were largely slotted in the Albanian school system; those who wished to retain their distinct identity and to be educated in the Serbian language were left out.

21. Now, particularly, the Slavic Muslims in Dragas have come under intense attack, with three grenade attacks against residences within a four-day period in October: On 16 October, a hand grenade was thrown into the yard of a Slavic Muslim house in central Dragas. The house had just been rebuilt after being set on fire in July 1999. On 20 October, a bomb exploded in the yard of a Slavic Muslim house in Dragas, causing substantial property damage but no casualties. Also on 20 October, a Slavic Muslim aged 69 was abducted in Decane and on the same day a hand grenade was thrown into the yard of a Slavic Muslim house in the centre of Dragas, again causing property damage but no casualties. The attacks are believed to have two aims: to pressure remaining Slavic Muslims to leave and to prevent Slavic Muslims who left Kosovo during the conflict from returning.

E. The wider Mitrovica area

22. The situation in and around Mitrovica has deteriorated significantly over the past two months. This was triggered by Serb demonstrations on 9 September against an attempted return of an Albanian family to the Serb-dominated north of the town, which provoked gunfire and resulted in the wounding of an Albanian. Shooting continued during the

⁷ After a spate of murders and house burnings during the past two months, only some 80 Serbs remain in Prizren Town. Around 167 individuals have sought shelter and protection in the Prizren Seminary.

evening, with Albanians from the south crossing to the Serb side and throwing grenades which injured several Serbs and KFOR troops. They were only repelled when KFOR retaliated with blast grenades. A corresponding movement of Serbs from Zvecan towards Mitrovica was blocked by KFOR.

23. Ever since, the city has become more divided, with extremists dictating the agenda. Security remains the overriding concern, as the following selection of incidents suggests: In the course of a ceremony on 5 October for the burial of persons exhumed from a mass grave, some Serbs passing by came into conflict with Albanians attending the funeral. One Serb was killed, two seriously injured, and other civilians hurt. In addition, 4 Russian KFOR soldiers and 13 French Gendarmerie were injured. In the early hours of the following morning, there were some explosions (believed by KFOR to have been rocket propelled grenades) in the vicinity of the hospital. In mid-October, a 73 year old Serb woman was murdered in her home with an axe. During the same period, one Serb male was shot in his field in Banjska (**Vucitrn** municipality) by three Albanians. One Albanian fisherman was also killed, reportedly in retaliation for the killing of a Serb during the funeral. In the third week of October, 50 persons were injured in the course of a rally organised by Albanian students and the Albanian Republican Party in Mitrovica. One Albanian family was attacked in the north part of town on the same day. On 16 October, five hand-made explosives were installed on the doors of one Slavic Muslim and four Albanian houses in a mixed neighbourhood in the north part of town. Over the past six days, 12 Serbs have been kidnapped while working in the south of Mitrovica.

24. Despite efforts by the international community to work towards an integrated city, local efforts to dismantle multi-ethnic institutions continue. The controversial and unresolved issues include, in particular, the hospital, education, the university, and the Trepca factory, all of which are causing tensions in town and have led to a series of at times violent and very tense demonstrations. Only a few Serbs remain in the south, in the neighbourhood next to the Orthodox church, and the some 2,000 Albanians in the north live in constant fear.

25. In a related development, Serb leaders based in the north of Mitrovica are open about encouraging the Kosovo Serb displaced communities in Central Serbia to return to Serb-controlled areas in the north of Kosovo, irrespective of whether or not they originate from these areas.

26. Equally of concern are attempts by Albanian extremists to ‘enforce’ return to the north and to provoke violent clashes with the Serbs while displacing Serbs living in the wider southern Mitrovica area and blocking the return of Serbs to their original homes in the south. Also, both sides seem to be heavily armed, as some of the security incidents suggest.

F. Orahovac

27. The Albanian blockade of the Russian troop deployment has thwarted earlier attempts of confidence-building meetings between Serbs and Albanians, and has more generally led to increased tension. As a result, about 2,300 Serbs continue living in a ghetto-like situation without any freedom of movement. Especially the displaced amongst this group are desperate to leave for Serbia or Montenegro, and UNHCR has facilitated the movement of some of them on the basis of family reunification and vulnerability criteria. In addition, the approximately 1,000 remaining Serbs in nearby Velika Hoca are increasingly concerned

about limited freedom of movement, medical care and basic utilities. In Orahovac, verbal and physical assault aimed at the Roma population of some 400 individuals has continued over the past two months, although on a more positive note, Roma children are now able to go to Albanian schools.

G. The wider Pec area

28. The general climate in **Pec** is illustrated by the fact that a KFOR-escorted UNHCR evacuation convoy of Serbs from Orahovac to Montenegro was attacked by a violent mob while transiting through Pec on 27 October. While the circumstances of this attack are still unclear at the writing of this report, the incident is a setback in confidence-building efforts between the various ethnic groups. Since the beginning of October, attacks against minorities, particularly the Slavic Muslim and Roma/Ashkalija communities, have increased in the Pec area. Several killings, a number of extortion cases, evictions and widespread incidents of threats and harassment, particularly in Pec and Istok municipalities, were reported. For example, one Slavic Muslim was shot on 2 October, and another was found dead on 6 October.

29. Tensions in **Istok** municipality rose in mid-October, particularly in relation to the spontaneous return of 29 Serbs to the area. The Serbs, who were formerly displaced in Central Serbia, arrived in Cerkoz (a village with a Serb population and heavy KFOR presence). The movement, from Serbia via Zubin Potok, was self-organised and in part escorted by KFOR. One automatic rifle, some hand grenades and ammunition found with one family were confiscated by KFOR. The group reported that conditions in Serbia were not good, and that they had heard on the radio that Kosovo Serbs should return to Zubin Potok, that the conditions were favourable and that they would be welcomed in transit shelters in Zubin Potok. As a result of the movement, a public demonstration on behalf of Albanian detainees was held to protest the Serb presence in the municipality. Given the tense security situation, this group eventually decided to travel back to Serbia.

30. Large numbers of Roma have left three different villages in **Klina** municipality over the past two months. The movements occurred quickly and without any early warning. Isolated Roma families in other areas also appear to be moving in a hasty fashion.

H. Overall emerging trends

31. Two types of emerging trends are evident: those that have been present since June but whose existence has been overshadowed by more violent incidents, and those which are now emerging, often related to the onset of winter. Among the former are threats against the LDK and Albanians critical of anti-Serb violence⁸, discrimination in employment (particularly the appointment of unqualified but politically acceptable factory directors by the self-appointed authorities), and problems of access to specific basic needs, such as medical facilities. Of these, the first affects sectors of the Kosovo Albanian community, the second affects or will affect all communities, and the latter impacts most on minorities.

⁸ See, for instance, Peter Finn, "Intolerance Threatens to Consume Kosovo," *Washington Post*, 13 October 1999, page A1. After speaking out against anti-Serb violence, the publisher of Kosovo's influential newspaper *Koha Ditore* was labelled in the official press of the self-proclaimed government as a "pro-Serb vampire" who should not go unpunished.

32. New trends, often related to the onset of winter, include concerns about access to humanitarian aid, particularly for remote minority villages. Villagers are concerned that stocks will not last, that stocks will be distributed on a discriminatory basis, or that they will be unable to reach distribution centres. These fears, for those who have already faced nearly four months of tension, restricted freedom of movement, harassment and intimidation, are increasingly acute.

I. Action taken

33. UNMIK continues to be actively engaged in monitoring and devising initiatives to address the alarming situation faced by the remaining minority communities in Kosovo. In addition to pressuring local Albanian leaders to prevent harassment and violence, UNHCR, OSCE, and the UN Civil Administration focus on identifying specific individuals and communities which require increased physical protection in order to aid KFOR and UNMIK security planning. Creative methods for increasing security, such as reinforcement of doors, installation of emergency calling devices in homes, and the establishment of a hotline between lead agencies and KFOR are being implemented by the agencies concerned. OSCE in particular has been promoting the establishment with UNMIK of a fully-functioning criminal justice system, and will be proactive in ensuring that strong minority protections are included in the domestic legal framework and institutions being established.

34. UNHCR has designed a special humanitarian distribution network for needy minority groups, and interim systems for providing medical care to minority groups who are otherwise denied access. UNHCR is currently compiling data on school-aged minorities, which will provide the basis for its assistance in their inclusion in educational services through transportation to school, rehabilitation of school buildings, and possibly the provision of text books.

35. Fruitful dialogue has been facilitated among community leaders, 'go and see' visits for displaced persons have been organised in some areas, and satellite phones and UNHCR bus services for isolated minority communities have been provided. OSCE furthermore addresses a major source of frustration for the Albanian population by looking into the creation of a mechanism to report and eventually investigate past human rights abuses that will not fall under the scope or capacity of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia. Finally, the Ad Hoc Task Force on Minorities continues to maximise the capabilities of the international community in Kosovo, and meets weekly to co-ordinate action.

36. The Special Advisor to the SRSB on Human Rights, in co-operation with UNHCR and OSCE, assists in identifying priority issues concerning the protection of minorities. His interventions are aimed at bringing awareness of those issues within UNMIK structures in order to facilitate swift responses.

37. Since mid-September, the UN Civil Administration has appointed Civil Affairs Minority Officers who reside on a permanent basis in selected villages/communities in Kosovo. The aim of this initiative has been to contribute to a further improvement of the security in areas with minorities and to extend the provision of essential administrative services at the community and grassroots level. In this respect, the Civil Affairs Minority Officers facilitate access of the local population to essential public services provided by the

UN Civil Administration (health, education, etc.). They also facilitate contacts with different local and international actors in support of reconstruction and revitalisation of the local economy. The Officers work closely with UNMIK Police, KFOR, UNHCR, and OSCE.

UNHCR/OSCE
3 November 1999