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Remarks by Mr. Dusan Kozarev, Deputy Director, Office for Kosovo and Metohija,

Government of the Republic of Serbia

Human Dimension Implementation Meeting

Working session 14: Tolerance and non-discrimination II

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Ladies and gentlemen, I am Dusan Kozarev, Deputy Director in the Office for Kosovo and Metohija of the Republic of Serbia.

In Kosovo and Metohija, Serbian religious heritage is essential element of national identity. Serbian Orthodox churches and monasteries in Kosovo and Metohija are proof of the antiquity of Serbian statehood, suffering and survival of its people, and Serbs are deeply attached to them.

Religious monuments listed as world heritage were exposed to the destructive Albanian nationalism even before 1999 conflict. Residential facility in Patriarchate of Peć was set on fire, while other monuments were repeatedly plundered and desecrated during the 80's of the 20th century. The church Our Lady of Lyevis in Prizren that is under UNESCO protection, was looted and damaged in 1999, while the parish hall building was torched to the ground. After the 1999 deployment of respective international presences in Kosovo and Metohija, 141 of Serbian Orthodox churches and monasteries were completely or significantly damaged. Only during the violence in March 2004, thirtyfive religious sites of the Serbian Orthodox Church were demolished and destroyed.

The Visoki Decani monastery from the 14th century, which is also under UNESCO protection, is the most frequently attacked Christian religious site in Kosovo and Metohija. Monastery suffered four armed attacks in 1999, two mortar attacks in 2000, another mortar attack during riots in March 2004, and finally grenade launcher attack in 2007. In October 2014, buildings within the monastery property were painted with graffiti "ISIS", "Caliphate is coming", "UCK", Albanian National Army.

For two decades already incidents based on hatred have been jeopardizing the collective dimension of freedom of religion in Kosovo and Metohija. Breaking and looting of churches, writing graffiti, harassment of monks, usurpation of church property, illegal construction on church land and desecration of Orthodox cemeteries are still occurring on a daily basis in

Kosovo and Metohija. Serious problem is repeated obstruction of celebration of Christian holidays. It became practice that radical movement “Self-determination” prevents celebration of Christmas, Easter, traditional Serbian annual pilgrimage on St. Vitus Day, memorial services and All Souls’ Day.

Only in the first 6 months of 2015, there have been 9 incidents involving “UCK” and “ISIS” graffiti, looting of churches, destruction of orthodox cemeteries and even desecration of the monument to the children killed in Serbian enclave of Gorazdevac.

Let me emphasize that none of mentioned criminal acts have been either prosecuted or penalized so far.

To the contrary, in July 2015 an appellate panel of the special chamber of the Supreme Court reached a decision that the Supreme Court does not have jurisdiction in the case between the Serbian Orthodox Monastery of Visoki Dečani and the municipality of Dečani over disputed land near the monastery. Despite all previous instances, including the regular panel of the special chamber of the Supreme Court which has ruled in favor of the monastery, the appellate panel declared that court incompetent and instructed that the case be sent to the Dečani branch of the Peć basic court after more than ten years of judicial activity in the case.

Furthermore, in August 2015 and in violation of relevant procedures, a 19th century guesthouse was demolished in the Historic Centre of Prizren without the approval of the municipal cultural heritage council.

The Serbian Government has been trying to open discussion about status of the Serbian Orthodox Church and its property within the frame of the Brussels dialogue, but our attempts are constantly discouraged by other side.

Having in mind such circumstances, we believe that there is neither legal nor moral ground for so called “Republic of Kosovo” to become a member of UNESCO.

Therefore, we wish to draw your attention to this issue that clearly demands greater involvement of international community. We support OSCE regular reporting on incidents and expect the issuance of thematic reports on this topic.

Thank you.

THE MOST RECENT DESECRATIONS OF THE CHRISTIAN ORTHODOX HERITAGE IN KOSOVO AND METOHIJA

July 2015

Church of Saint Paraskeva from 16th century in the returnees' village near Klina, was looted and desecrated twice within 48 hours.

Irreparable damage was made on frescoes.



Febryary 2015



Desecrated cemetery in the village of Krusevac. Gravestones were firstly covered with garbage and then destroyed and set on fire.



Febryary 2015

On the Day of the Presentation of Jesus at the Temple, the acronym of the Kosovo Liberation Army (UCK) was sprayed on the main gate of the Serbian Orthodox Seminary of St. Cyril and Methodius in Prizren.

January 2015

On Christmas Eve, around 200 Albanian demonstrators blocked access to the monastery of the Holy Mother of God in Djakovica for about 100 Serbs who wanted to commemorate the holiday. They also stoned their buses.

On the external walls of the monastery, UCK graffiti were written.





January 2015

For the Orthodox Christmas, the UCK graffiti (abbreviation of Kosovo Liberation Army in Albanian language) was written on the church of Saint Flora and Lavre in Lipljan.

ATTACKS ON THE VISOKI DECANI MONASTERY IN 2014

