

AI INDEX: EUR 70/03/00

13 January 2000

Kosovo: KFOR must act now to curb violence against ethnic minorities

The murder of a Slavic Muslim family in Prizren town yesterday highlights the continuing failure of the international community to protect the human rights of all minorities in Kosovo, Amnesty International said today.

The slain victims -- a father, mother, daughter and elderly grandmother -- were shot dead in their home by an unknown perpetrator in the southern Kosovo town of Prizren where ethnic Turks, Serbs, Roma, Slavic Muslims and the Gorani live alongside ethnic Albanians.

Murders, violent attacks, intimidation against minorities and house burnings in the Prizren area have continued at an alarming rate since the departure of the Yugoslav forces and deployment of the international security presence (KFOR) in June 1999.

Almost all Serbs in the villages surrounding Prizren have been compelled to leave their homes. Members of the Serb community and other minorities frequently seek refuge in the Serbian Orthodox Church where they await an escort out of Kosovo.

“Although the majority of victims over the past six months have been elderly Serbs and Roma, violence and intimidation against other minorities, particularly Slavic Muslims and the Gorani, has steadily continued in the past three months,” Amnesty International said.

“After repeated appeals from the remaining minority communities for enhanced security in the Prizren area, KFOR increased measures in December to provide protection to them. Despite this, violence against minorities and destruction of their property has increased sharply in recent weeks culminating in this horrific incident.”

“There are currently 42,500 KFOR troops in Kosovo with the mandate to create a secure environment for all communities. It is time for the international presence to fulfil its obligation to protect human rights and take urgent action to prevent further human rights abuses,” Amnesty International urged.

Background

In June 1999 the international security and civilian presences, KFOR and UNMIK, were deployed to Kosovo by the United Nations to order to create a secure environment and to protect and promote the human rights of all. The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) were given the specific mandate to protect minorities in Kosovo. However, more than six months after the deployment of KFOR and UNMIK, human rights abuses against Serbs, Roma and increasingly Kosovo's smaller minority communities, continue to be perpetrated on a daily basis.

ENDS.../

For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on 44 171 413 5566 or visit our website at <http://www.amnesty.org>