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## **Serbia/Kosovo: Wounds still open 10 years after start of war over Kosovo**

Ten years after the war in Kosovo the majority of those responsible for the enforced disappearance and abduction of ethnic Albanians and Serbs have still not faced justice, Amnesty International said on the eve of the tenth anniversary of the start of NATO bombing of Serbia in March 1999. The organization reiterates its calls for urgent measures to resolve the massive backlog of war crimes and impunity for human rights violations.

“Authorities in both Kosovo and Serbia have failed in their obligations to initiate independent, thorough and impartial investigations. Few of those responsible for enforced disappearances and abductions have been prosecuted in either jurisdiction,” said Nicola Duckworth, Europe and Central Asia Programme Director at Amnesty International.

Amnesty International records a history of undocumented exhumations, lost documentation, political interference in the justice system, aborted investigations, and a massive duplication of effort by different agencies. These have combined to deny many relatives of the thousands of missing people the return of their mortal remains while the majority have also been denied access to justice.

More than 3,000 ethnic Albanians were “disappeared” by Serbian police, paramilitary and military forces; other ethnic Albanians were abducted by members of ethnic Albanian armed opposition groups.

An estimated 800 Serbs, Roma and members of other minority groups were also abducted, reportedly by members of the Kosovo Liberation Army, many of them after the international armed conflict ended in June 1999, under the eyes of the NATO-led peacekeeping Kosovo force.

Around 1,900 families in both Kosovo and Serbia still await news of the fate and whereabouts of their relatives. Amnesty International interviewed relatives of the missing on both sides of the conflict in its aftermath, and returned to Serbia and to Kosovo in February 2009 to talk to the relatives again.

“The relatives of the disappeared and missing continue to live in anxiety and anguish, not knowing what happened to their loved ones, unable to mourn their deaths or dignify their memory by burying them in proper graves. So far, the bodies of only half of those disappeared or missing have been returned to their relatives for burial,” Nicola Duckworth said.

“The relatives are themselves victims of an ongoing violation of their right to know the fate and whereabouts of their family members. They have had not been granted access to justice, nor to redress and reparations for their loss.”

Amnesty International calls on the authorities in Serbia and Kosovo, including the EU-led rule of law mission EULEX, to cooperate in the investigation of cases in order to inform the relatives of the fate of their loved ones, and to bring the perpetrators to justice.

### **Background**

On 24 March 1999, NATO launched “Operation Allied Force” against Serbia, seeking to prevent attacks on ethnic Albanians in Kosovo by Serb military, police and paramilitary forces.. After the end of the conflict in June the same year, Kosovo was placed under UN administration.

Kosovo declared unilateral independence from Serbia on 17 February 2008.

A new European Union-led mission (EULEX) took over responsibilities from the UN Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) on 9 December 2008. Its mandate includes the investigation and prosecution of outstanding war crimes and other serious crimes

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