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Kosovo: Six months on, climate of violence and fear flies in the face of UN mission

Violence against Serbs, Roma, Muslim Slavs and moderate Albanians in Kosovo has increased dramatically over the past month pointing to a failure by the United Nations (UN) mission to protect human rights, Amnesty International said today.

Murder, abductions, violent attacks, intimidation, and house burning are being perpetrated on a daily basis at a rate which is almost as high as it was in June when the international UN civilian and security presence (KFOR) were initially deployed.

In the first week of December, 24 murders were reported. Amnesty International is particularly concerned about reports of abductions of young children and women which have reached an alarming rate in recent weeks. Two Serb women who were abducted and reportedly tortured and raped in October escaped and an investigation is under way.

Serbs and Roma are now almost all living in enclaves protected by KFOR troops and Serbs in Priština (Prishtina) and other mixed communities require a military KFOR escort to leave their homes and conduct daily tasks such as buying food. On 7 December, an elderly Serb woman and her son were found murdered in their home in a central area of Priština. Their home was not guarded by KFOR troops.

Identity-based human rights abuses are coupled with abuses which appear to be part of an organized campaign to silence moderate voices in ethnic Albanian society.

Last month, *Kontakt*, a multi-ethnic radio station based in Priština had its offices ransacked and equipment stolen. Members of Kosovo's Democratic League of Kosovo party have also increasingly become the target of attacks and intimidation.

The UN is responsible for the protection and promotion of human rights in Kosovo. The mission is required to take active steps to ensure safety and accountability but it is currently ill-equipped to do so. The Secretary-General of the UN stated several months ago that 6,000 international police officers were required to effectively police Kosovo, however to date only 1,890 have been deployed. This has led to a law and order vacuum.

“Violent human rights abuses continue to be perpetrated at an alarming rate with impunity. Unless the remaining international police officers are deployed, this situation will continue and a system of law and order will not be established in Kosovo,” Amnesty International said.

“The law and order vacuum also results from the fact that the UN has thus far failed to establish a functioning, independent and impartial judicial system,” Amnesty International said.

Amnesty International is also concerned that the UN mission and KFOR appears reluctant to take steps to bring to justice members of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) and the Kosovo Protection Corps who commit human rights abuses such as unlawful detentions, beatings or evictions. At present there is no effective sanction for crimes committed in Kosovo.

“The campaign for human rights in Kosovo is far from over. In the spring of this year the international community intervened in Kosovo with the declared aim of preventing a human rights catastrophe. However, at the closing of the year human rights abuses continue to be perpetrated on a daily basis,”

“In order to bring about a significant improvement, the international community should live up to its promises and redouble its efforts to ensure respect for human rights for everyone in Kosovo,” Amnesty International urged.

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