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Helsinki board criticizes initiative to introduce religious instruction in schools

BETA DAILY NEWS (22.11.2000) / HRWF International Secretariat (24.11.2000) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: info@hrwf.net - The Serbian Helsinki Human Rights Board criticized on Nov. 21 a joint initiative by Yugoslav President Vojislav Kostunica and the Serbian Orthodox Church to introduce religious instruction in schools, saying that this would "seriously violate the principles of a secular state."

"The inclusion of religious instruction into the school curriculum would mark the return of the church from the sphere of personal to public life as a form of indoctrination, and only for one religion at that. This will cause children and parents to state their religious affiliation, which in conditions of lasting religious and national intolerance in Serbia can only create problems," a statement said.

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Islamic Militants Behind Raid on Kosovan Pentecostal Church ?

by Felix Corley

Keston News Service (18.05.2000)/HRWF International Secretariat (30.05.2000) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: info@hrwf.net - The Fellowship of the Lord's People, an Assemblies of God Church in the Kosovan capital Prishtina, was raided by self-proclaimed Islamic militants in the early hours of 29 April. The robbers, who claimed to represent the Kosovo branch of an organisation linked to Saudi Islamic Osama bin Laden, threatened the occupants with guns during a two-hour raid and stole a considerable sum of money, a computer and other valuable items of equipment. They daubed the door and the walls of the church building with Islamic slogans.

The United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) police force has primary responsibility for law and order in the Prishtina region and its officers visited the incident, but an UNMIK representative told Keston News Service from Prishtina that so far they are only looking at the raid 'from a criminal aspect'.

However, he promised that all three raids the church has endured over the past year would be reviewed.

The overwhelming majority of Kosovo's Albanian population is of Muslim background, though some Albanians are Christians (mostly Catholic, with a small number of Protestants). The vast majority of the Serbs that remain in Kosovo are of Serbian Orthodox background.

'On Friday after the Teenager's Meeting, four of us were sleeping at the house of the Church,' the pastor ARTUR KRASNIQI and his brother DRITON reported. 'Around 2 am "someone" rang the bell and Louis (a fellow believer and missionary from Times Square Church, New York) went to look who it was and three gunmen with masks pointed the gun on him and entered the house by tying Louis' hands, mouth, eyes and legs.' The intruders then woke KRESHNIK MORINA, a 14 year-old church member, and threatened him with a gun. Artur Krasniqi heard the gunmen call on Morina at gunpoint to renounce Christianity in favour of Islam, but the boy refused.

'I was in bed when I heard the noise and straight after, a gunman came to my head, same thing to Driton. They said they would kill two others if we even moved. "Islamic, Islamic, Islamic," they said in poor English. After that six of them came in with their guns and masks on their faces. "We represent Bin Laden's Organisation for Kosova," they told us. They really wanted to kill us after I refused to give them any information about the money. After two hours they left, taking many things and left us tied on the floor hardly breathing. We don't know when they left but we couldn't believe that we were alive.' The intruders had daubed Islamic slogans on the walls, such as 'Kosova Islamic Country' and 'OBL', a reference to Osama bin Laden.

Krasniqi reported that the UNMIK police arrived an hour after the intruders had left and, according to Krasniqi, did little to help them despite their being 'very traumatised'. However, representatives from the peacekeeping Kosovo Force (KFOR) have shown interest, and KFOR representatives attended a meeting at the church on 9 May. 'The British KFOR is trying to do something investigating this crime,' Artur Krasniqi declared. 'There have been no results yet, even though they have some information already. From UN so far nothing.

"Defend yourself" was the reply of some UNMIK policemen.'

A spokesman for the UNMIK police in Prishtina region, CHARLEY JOHNSON, confirmed that UNMIK had attended the church in the wake of the raid. 'The incident has been listed not as an ethnic crime, but one of robbery and vandalism,' Johnson told Keston from Prishtina on 16 May. 'The UNMIK police are looking at it from a criminal aspect. We have not developed any suspects as yet.' Johnson pointed out two elements in this raid. 'Firstly, other independent Christian structures are few and far between. Secondly, this church is located in a busy residential and commercial area. It is quite possible for people to gain access to the courtyard and then to be unnoticed.'

After talking to one of the UNMIK officers that had visited the church, Johnson confirmed to Keston that the officer had told the church members that they would have to protect themselves, but felt that the statement might have been taken out of context. 'The officer stated that because of manpower shortages they would not be able to put a continual surveillance on the church or provide much in the way of additional patrols. He did indicate to them that they needed to take steps to encourage their own defence.'

Johnson told Keston that UNMIK police have 'no leads' that Islamic militants were behind the raid and speculation continues over their identity. Krasniqi reported: 'One of the thieves spoke some words in Serbian, but mostly they spoke English.' Johnson pledged that all three incidents involving the church would be revisited by investigators.

'The local newspapers and radio have given a lot of attention to this. Almost every daily newspaper wrote a long article on this on the very front pages,' Krasniqi declared (although the 1 May issue of the Albanian-language newspaper Koha Ditore wrongly reported that it had been the Baptist church in Prishtina which had been raided).

Krasniqi notes that this raid - the third since the end of fighting and the withdrawal of Serbian forces from Kosovo in June last year - was the worst so far. The church has appealed to the European Union and the United States government for measures to be taken to prevent further such raids.

Krasniqi is also seeking money to install gates, metal bars over the windows and an alarm system to try to deter further attacks.

Krasniqi fears for the future. 'We are considering this as the beginning of the future hard persecution against Christians in the country. Long is the list of believers who in one way or another are facing persecution. Many are anonymous phone calls to our Church that they are going to kill us all, and burn this Church down. The monthly Islamic magazine "Dituria Islame" (Islamic Knowledge) publishes at least one article against our Church in each issue. They never forget to mention that in Kosova lots and lots of money

Is poured in, so this is a kind of inspiration for the criminals to attack Christians with the assurance they will find money.' However, Krasniqi pledges that the work of his church will continue.

Other Protestant leaders have told Keston that attacks have occurred on their places of worship in other areas of Kosovo. BEKIM BEKA, pastor of the New Hope Baptist Church in Prishtina, told Keston on 10 May that one such incident had taken place in the Italian sector in south western Kosovo.

'There is a huge campaign against Evangelical Christians in Kosovo,' he claimed.

'Attacks on religious buildings are not rare, but are not exceptionally prevalent,' Johnson of UNMIK told Keston. 'The primary targets have been Serbian Orthodox churches.'

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An appeal to free Jehovah's Witnesses jailed in Serbia as Conscientious Objectors

HRWF International Secretariat (03.04.2000) - Website: www.hrwf.net - Email: info@hrwf.net - Presently, there are still 11 Jehova's Witnesses imprisoned in Yugoslavia who have been condemned to lengthy prison terms as described in the chart presented hereafter. For the moment, Serbia has no provision for an alternativa civil sevice for conscientious objectors.

Name: Antic, Ivica

Birth date: Unknown

Court: Military Court

Date and number of Court Decision: Unknown

First penalty: 5 years

Second penalty: 3 years

Extraordinary legal remedy: 3 years (denied)

Date of imprisonment: Unknown

Name: Jemic, Rade

Birth date: 03.02.1971

Court: Military Court

Date and number of Court Decision: 12.05.1999 - IK 44/99

First penalty: 5 years

Second penalty: 5 years

Extraordinary legal remedy: in process

Date of imprisonment: 27.04. 1999

Name: Kovacevic, Dimitrija

Birth date: 06.03.1959

Court: Military Court

Date and number of Court Decision: 17.04.1999 - IK 13/99

First penalty: 5 years

Second penalty: 5 years

Extraordinary legal remedy: 1 year

Date of imprisonment: 04.04.1999

Name: Milenkovic, Goran

Birth date: 08.08.1963

Court: Military Court

Date and number of Court Decision: 05.05.1999 - IK 42/99

First penalty: 4 years

Second penalty: 2 1/2 years

Extraordinary legal remedy: in process

Date of imprisonment: 29.04.1999

Name: Miljickovic, Srdjan

Birth date: 27.07.1969

Court: Military Court

Date and number of Court Decision: 01.06.1999 - Ik 70/99

First penalty: 4 years

Second penalty: 2 years

Extraordinary legal remedy: 1 year
Date of imprisonment: 18.05.1999
Name: Misic, Dusan
Birth date: 06.09.1977
Court: Military Court
Date and number of Court Decision: 08.04.1999 - IK 1/99

First penalty: 5 years
Second penalty: Unknown

Extraordinary legal remedy: 16 months
Date of imprisonment: 01.04.1999

Name: Musafet, Morina
Birth date: 24.04.1972
Court: Military Court

Date and number of Court Decision: 10.04.1999 - IK 4/99

First penalty: 5 years
Second penalty: 5 years

Extraordinary legal remedy: 1 year
Date of imprisonment: 05.04.1999

Name: Nedeljkovic, Tomica
Birth date: 26.04.1969
Court: Military Court

Date and number of Court Decision: 22.04.1999 - IK 12/99

First penalty: 6 years
Second penalty: 5 years
Extraordinary legal remedy: 1 year
Date of imprisonment: 13.04.1999
Name: Pintac, Ivan
Birth date: Unknown
Court: Military Court
Date and number of Court Decision: Unknown

First penalty: 6 years
Second penalty: 5 years
Extraordinary legal remedy: in process
Date of imprisonment: Unknown
Name: Radovic, Miodrag
Birth date: 15.09.1959
Court: Military Court
Date and number of Court Decision: 21.04.1999 - IK 2/99

First penalty: 2 years
Second penalty: Unknown
Extraordinary legal remedy: in process
Date of imprisonment: 10.04.1999
Name: Velinov, Sinisa
Birth date: Unknown
Court: Military Court

Date and number of Court Decision: Unknown - IK 45/99

First penalty: 5 years

Second penalty: 5 years

Extraordinary legal remedy: 1 year

Date of imprisonment: Unknown