

UNHCR

Preliminary Assessment Of the
Situation of Ethnic Minorities in Kosovo

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INTRODUCTION

The weeks following the withdrawal of Yugoslav forces and the arrival of KFOR has seen an exodus of the ethnic minority population, particularly the Serbs, from Kosovo. The security situation for those who stayed remains very tense and extremely volatile with significant numbers facing arson attacks, threats to their person and in extreme cases murder.

Under UN Security Council Resolution 1244 of 10 June 1999 the UN Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) is tasked with providing assistance and protection to minorities. The importance of this role was emphasised in the statement of the acting Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) made on 14 July 1999. The Deputy SRSG for Humanitarian Affairs established an inter-agency Ad Hoc Task Force on Minorities. One of the first acts of this body was the commissioning of this joint UNHCR/OSCE Report. UNHCR's mandate in Kosovo covers the internally displaced, and indeed many a minority group has been displaced over the last few weeks or risks displacement. In such situations, UNHCR has understood its protection role to promote an environment which allows the exercise of the right to remain. OSCE's clear interest stems from its assigned role in the UNMIK structure for human rights monitoring. KFOR has the mandate and responsibility in accordance with the aforementioned resolution to ensure both public order and safety until UNMIK itself can take full responsibility for maintaining civil law and order in Kosovo.

The information gathered on the whereabouts and numbers of ethnic minorities currently in Kosovo provides a basis for discussion of possible short and long-term responses. It is clear that a principled strategy for dealing with these groups must be explored if the human rights of all those present in Kosovo are to be respected.

This report is a preliminary assessment of the situation of minorities in Kosovo and covers events up to 19 July 1999. The information provided is not exhaustive but rather indicative of the present situation. UNHCR and OSCE field staff were charged with the task of identifying and examining the situation of minority populations municipality by municipality. As much information as possible was gathered first-hand but given the time and security constraints, some secondary sources were used, in particular KFOR, local community and religious leaders. Some of the areas understood to have significant minority communities are also naturally the most insecure and therefore difficult for the moment to obtain reliable data on. Nevertheless, this exercise has at least afforded an opportunity to identify these communities for urgent follow-up. The last census carried out in 1991, although controversial because of the limited participation of the Albanian community, was useful in identifying the possible location of various minority communities.

OVERVIEW

Kosovo hosts a complex mixture of ethnic groups, Albanians (some Catholics, as well as Muslims), Serbs, Roma, Muslim Slavs, Turkish to name a few. Despite the recent exodus of non-Albanians from Kosovo, Serbs and Roma remain the prominent minorities and are evidently the groups most at risk from harassment and intimidation. The position of the various smaller groups differs considerably. Croatian Serb refugees represent a particularly vulnerable group.

Whether a specific community is victimised seems to depend largely on whether its members are perceived to have been involved in recent Serb atrocities or indeed to have passively supported the Serb regime of the last decade. It would appear that groups are being stigmatised irrespective of any actual complicity, for example indiscriminate attacks on elderly Serbs. While in some areas KFOR has provided dedicated security for minority communities, this has not always been able to be

comprehensive. Manpower constraints are a factor, but there is also the more general issue of providing area security with its demands on resources.

Although the situation of minorities needs attention throughout Kosovo there are clearly some areas which require urgent action. Priority needs to be given to the potentially explosive situations in Djakovica and Kosovo Polje where large numbers of Roma have concentrated. The efforts being made to address the continuing partition of Mitrovica between the Serbs and Albanians also requires continued, intensive attention as does the congregation of thousands of Serbs in the northern part of Orahovac town.

However, the picture is neither entirely bleak nor uniform. There are those villages and towns where mixed communities continue to live peacefully together and others where, although there is some tension, relationships have not deteriorated to the point of no return. A positive example is the case of Landovica near Prizren where Roma have returned to their homes within days of fleeing because of arson attacks, as a result of reconciliation talks facilitated by UNHCR.

Ethnic Serbs

It is estimated by Serb journalists that prior to the conflict some 40-45,000 Serbs lived in Pristina city alone with perhaps another 60,000 spread out in the rest of the municipality. However, the numbers are considered to have dropped to less than 5,000 in the urban areas with a further 40,000 outside. The majority left as the VJ forces withdrew but more recent departures have been prompted by attacks on this community, as well as general fear and insecurity. For example in the city, there are reportedly 3 to 4 cases of kidnapping per week. Many Serbs are now moving for safety to Serb villages such as Gracanica within the municipality. This is illustrated by the Serb families remaining in Ajvalija village who, following incidents such as hand grenade attacks, no longer stay there at night but take shelter in Gracanica instead. These communities are keen for increased KFOR presence.

Neighbouring Podujevo municipality is traditionally Albanian, and the spate of arson attacks and intimidation (including three murders of Serbs in the first two weeks) that followed the withdrawal of Serb forces has led to the flight of almost the entire 1,400 Serb population. Only five Serbs (including three elderly women) apparently remain in the main town guarded closely by KFOR, whilst a handful are thought to be scattered in the surrounding villages. The only three Serb families that lived in Glogovac municipality before the war left for Serbia and Montenegro in June 1999, transforming Glogovac into a 100% Albanian municipality.

The estimated 9,000-strong Serb population in Obilic municipality is composed of a disproportionate number of elderly and male persons, many families having sent at least one member to Serbia during the conflict. The Serbs currently form the majority in four villages (Babin Most, Plemetina, Crkvena Vodica and Milosevo) while they are a significant minority in Obilic town. The level of daily intimidation faced by these communities has completely restricted their freedom of movement. In the week of 5-10 July 1999 alone one Serb was murdered on his doorstep, there was an upsurge of grenade attacks on Serb homes and KFOR received reports of 81 arson attacks, 36 lootings of homes, one kidnapping and four missing persons. It should be noted that the Serbs in Plemetina village consider their problems to stem from Albanian outsiders rather than their neighbours. Nevertheless, there is clearly a deep sense of resentment amongst the Albanian community at large against the remaining Serb population, particularly given that this municipality houses three mass grave sites. Many in the Serb community have indicated that, if the security situation deteriorates and they continue to face problems working in the major industrial/mining sites, they will leave.

Kosovo Polje is a thoroughly ethnically mixed but potentially volatile area. Previously the population in the town comprised some 3,700 Albanians and almost 6,000 Serbs (with 5,000 from other minorities). The number of Albanians has swollen since the conflict while the Serbs have dropped to 3,500. In the surrounding villages, the number of mixed communities has dramatically reduced with only five villages still having significant Serb elements. The visible KFOR presence has managed to maintain a relative peace so far but the numbers of Albanians returning to destroyed neighbourhoods in an area which historically is a site of ethnic tensions means that attacks on Serbs are prevalent.

Reportedly ex-MUP and ex-KLA para-military are still active in the area, involved in threats and kidnapping.

There is a significant Serb population in the Mitrovica district, forming the ethnic majority in three municipalities. The north of Mitrovica town is predominantly Serb including an estimated 2,000 displaced from within the town alone. The atmosphere is extremely tense with regular stand-offs between the Serb and Albanian community taking place on the bridge dividing the town. Currently about 8,000 internally displaced ethnic Albanians are located in the southern part of town awaiting an improvement in the security situation before they return to their homes in the north. The Albanians already there live in extremely difficult circumstances, unable to move freely. The arrival of the UN Administrator has seen the commencement of negotiations between the two communities and could lead to an agreement within the next few days on return to pre-conflict homes and freedom of movement.

Leposavic, on the northern frontier of Kosovo, is almost entirely Serbian. The ethnic Albanian community have all left (destination unknown) whilst Serbs displaced from other parts of Kosovo have moved in. KFOR reports that 'spontaneous' returns of Serbs from Kosovo are taking place via Leposavic where the Yugoslav Red Cross runs one of its four transit centres (the others being in Priluzje, Zubin Potok and Kosovo Polje). 200 Serbs are currently in this centre with another 1,000 apparently hosted with relatives.

Almost all of Zvecan's inhabitants are also Serbs and they continue to run its administration. Its pre-war population of about 12,500 has increased by about 2,000 over the last few weeks as a result of an inflow of Serbs from Istok, Srbica, Mitrovica and primarily Vucitrn. At the moment they are mostly housed in private homes and schools and receive assistance from the local administration but the latter's capacity to cope is apparently close to collapse. Most of the pre-war Albanian community has fled leaving only two villages, Zaza and Oranova, with small Albanian populations. Like Zvecan, neighbouring Zubin Potok's predominantly Serb population of about 10,000 has risen by approximately 10% in the last month with the inflow of internally displaced but the situation appears relatively stable.

By contrast, Srbica's Serb community has traditionally been very small and is now reduced to the two villages of Suva Grlo (pop. 142) and Banja (pop. 232, mostly elderly) and the monastery of Device (8). Given that this area was a prime target of the 1998 Serb offensive (e.g. Drenica massacres), these Serbs are only able to remain because of close protection offered for the time being by KFOR.

In Vucitrn the majority of the pre-war Serb population has departed, with those that remain coming from predominantly Serb villages which benefit from strong KFOR presence in their vicinity. In Gojbula and Slatina villages there are 155 and 40 Serbs respectively, mostly men whose families have moved north or to Serbia for safety. As they are surrounded by ethnic Albanians these groups dare not move around without KFOR escort (there has been at least one incident of kidnapping in Gojbula). Local Albanians apparently consider Gojbula a base for Serbian nationalism, while attempts by local Albanians to make positive contact with the elderly Serbs in Slatina seem to have been dissuaded by the KLA. The situation for Serbs in Grace (pop. 541) and Priluzje (pop. 1,893) village seems much better, none having apparently been forced to leave. Indeed about 400 Serbs from outlying villages have relocated to these areas where the Yugoslav Red Cross is active. On an even more positive note, in the village of Banjska, 600 Albanians continue to live peacefully with the Serb population of 300, made possible perhaps because neither side suffered during the recent conflict.

Gnjilane municipality contains a significant number of Serb enclaves. In the town itself, there is a substantial, dispersed community of about 4,000 (estimate of the Orthodox church). This community has apparently been subjected to a range of intimidation over the last month from looting/arson to kidnappings and murder and is calling for increased KFOR protection as well as improved access to local (e.g. medical) facilities. According to KFOR the main villages inhabited exclusively by Serbs are Partesh, Pasjane, Silovo and Donja Budriga. However, the poor security situation in the first three villages has made assessment visits impossible thus far. As for Donja Budriga, it consists of 3,000 Serbs, 500 of whom have recently been displaced from nearby villages. The population there has

suffered physical assault, kidnappings and destruction of property but wishes to remain with improved KFOR security.

There is no permanent KFOR presence in the municipality of Novo Brdo which seems to have left the Serb population rather vulnerable, with the former Mayor reporting three murders. Because of the security situation information on the minority groups is sketchy but reportedly there are about 2,700 Serbs out of a total population of about 4,800. Again this community is pushing for increased KFOR presence to secure their situation and to allow them to pursue their farming activities.

Of the 13,000 ethnic Serbs who lived in the Kamenica municipality before the conflict it is estimated that around 8,000 have stayed in the area. Most of those who were living in Serb minority villages have moved to those which are predominantly Serb (Busince, Ajnovce and Firiceja) in the east of the municipality. In the main town, 1,200 from an original population of 1,850 have remained since the withdrawal of the Serb security forces, mostly grouped in the north-west part by the Orthodox Church. They are extremely concerned about personal security, especially at night, and KFOR has introduced a curfew from 22:00 hours to 4:00 hours. Looting and hand grenade attacks on Serb houses have been reported. However, the main security problem seems at the moment to be kidnapping. For example, three Serbs were abducted near the village of Ranilug on 10 July 1999. Because of the deteriorating security situation, relations between the communities have become almost non-existent. Serbs, for example, avoid all Albanian areas, and vice-versa. This often results in diminished access for the minority groups to food and supplies.

Of the 12,000 ethnic Serbs who lived in Vitina municipality before the conflict, approximately 7,000 are estimated to remain. It appears that the vast majority of Serbs from villages where they constituted the minority have either left for Serbia or have moved to one of the following eight villages: Binac, Mogila, Pozaranje, Zitinje, Vitina town (mixed communities), Grncar, Klokot and Vrbani (Serb villages). Increased KFOR protection is urgently required in the above-mentioned mixed villages where the remaining Serb (and Roma population) have recently been the victims of killings and assault and are on the verge of being forcibly displaced. Of a total of 13 incidents reported between 12 and 16 July 1999, which included three killings, two assaults with fire arms or hand grenades, three threats of eviction and one case of arson, nine were directed against Serbs. On 15 July 1999, a grenade exploded in the market in Vitina town in front of a Serb shop wounding 30 people. As a consequence, KFOR recalled troops from the villages and re-deployed them in the town itself.

Urosevac town is predominantly Albanian, most minorities such as the Gorani and Croatian Serb refugees having already left. The number of Serbs remaining is estimated at around 100. Most of this population appears to be elderly and/or disabled. Only a handful of Serb families are found in the outlying villages, namely in Jerli Talinovac, Muhadzer Talinovac, Jerli Prelez, Srpski Babus and Babljak. Again a relatively small number of Serbs, 200, remain in Lipjan town while the surrounding area hosts several Serb villages including Vrelo, Radevo, Lepina, Skulanovo, Suvi Do, Staro Gracko, Malo Gracko, Livadje, Donja Gusterica, Gornja Gusterica and Dobrotin. The only mixed villages appear to be Ravovce and Kojuh. These Serb communities have suffered the whole range of intimidation including bombs and grenades being detonated in public places and as a result they stick closely together, often under KFOR protection. However, KFOR considers that tensions have diminished over the last week.

All of the 500 Serbs of Suva Reka municipality are thought to have left. Most departed at the time of the VJ withdrawal but the few who remained in Musutiste were driven out over the next month because of severe harassment and arson. Some elderly Serbs have sought refuge in the Prizren seminary despite being assured of their safety by the self-appointed local authorities. The 26 Serbs remaining in Stimlje town are being protected in their homes by KFOR given the rather tense atmosphere there following incidents such as the recent murder of two elderly Serbs.

In the north of Orahovac town is a concentrated community of around 3,000 Serbs, many of whom are displaced from the south and the surrounding villages (e.g. over 200 from Zociste village whose houses have all been burnt). Over the last month there have been four murders, 20 kidnappings and 80 houses destroyed. Only 24-hour KFOR presence seems to be keeping the situation relatively under control, although the community continues to report incidents of intimidation. This is a particularly

explosive situation, not just because of the numbers but also because this group is perceived by the Albanian community to include persons guilty of committing atrocities. This community is becoming increasingly tense and desperate to be moved out of Kosovo. The only other Serb community known to be present in the municipality are the more than 1,000 living in the entirely Serb village of Velika Hoca. They have expressed the wish to remain in their homes so long as 24-hour KFOR protection remains.

Of the estimated pre-war 8,000 Serb population in Prizren city, fewer than 300 remain in a very hostile environment involving shootings, death threats, kidnappings, arson and looting. For example, in the last week, an elderly Serb was shot and 15 houses burned in a systematic fashion. 182 of the current population have taken refuge in the Orthodox monastery in town where they are protected by KFOR. Many of them have expressed a desire to join families in Serbia. A few villages still have Serb residents. Only two of the original 600 Serbs remain in Ljubidza, while a small number of elderly Serbs remain in the previously Serb villages of Zivinjane and Donje Srbica. However, in the Muslim villages of Skorobiste, and Planjane the Serb minority (including many elderly persons) do not appear to be facing any problems.

Dragas, which had a pre-war population of 1,000 Gorani, 400 ethnic Albanians and 40-50 Serbs, is the only one of 19 villages of Gora municipality that is not mainly inhabited by Gorani. However, during and after the war most Serbs left Dragas. Those few Serb families who remain face, like the Gorani, harassment and intimidation by ethnic Albanians. For example, it has been reported that persons identifying themselves as KLA have told all inhabitants not to listen to or play Serb music and to remove all Serbian signs from their houses. Those who did not follow these instructions had their windows broken.

Hardly any Serbs are known to have stayed in Djakovica municipality, but the pre-war figure of 1,800 indicates that there may still be some scattered around in small pockets. In the town itself 36 elderly and/or handicapped Serbs are living in a church under KFOR protection. Five are due to proceed to Montenegro for family reunion/medical evacuation, the rest are unsure about where their future lies. In Decani, twelve Serbs have taken refuge in a seminary which has been afforded 24-hour KFOR protection but, according to the monks, no other Serbs remain in the area.

Most of the Serbs who lived in Pec municipality before the conflict left the area during or after the withdrawal of the Serb security forces so that most formerly mixed villages are now essentially uni-ethnic Albanian. Only approximately 500-600 ethnic Serbs have remained in the municipality. Most of them are found in the Serb village of Gorazdevac (which houses a considerable number of Serb internally displaced) while 70 of them, mostly nuns or female relatives of kidnapped male Serbs, have sought refuge in the Patriarchate in Pec. KFOR provides 24-hour protection for the Serbs in these two locations. However, there is no protection for those few elderly Serbs who are dispersed in different houses in Pec town. If the security situation continues to deteriorate they might soon leave Pec.

It is thought that most of the Serbs from Klina and Istok municipalities have left but instances of elderly Serbs in Klina going to KFOR or the local Orthodox monastery for assistance are known. The village of Crkolez in Istok is comprised of 40 Serb families who, following verbal threats and displays of shooting by local Albanian villagers, are now receiving 24-hour KFOR protection. They have expressed a desire to stay so long as this level of security remains. Reconciliation activities through an Italian NGO will hopefully commence shortly.

Roma

Kosovo hosts a mixed Roma population, consisting of Albanian, Romany and Serbian-speaking groups. At the beginning of the decade certain communities began to insist that they were Egyptian rather than Roma, but they continue to be perceived as Roma by the other ethnic groups. Indeed there is no clear indication that their origins are separate from those of the Roma in this region.

The Roma community situated in the Gradski Park and Dragodan neighbourhoods of Pristina city have all left following threats. Most of their houses were subsequently burned and looted. A few

families still remain in other parts of the city but close to KFOR units. About 100 of the original population of approximately 1,400 Roma remain in Serb-dominated Gracanica village, while some families are also found in Laplje Selo.

The Roma population in Podujevo municipality is estimated at around 850, the vast majority of whom live in two suburbs of Podujevo town. Most of them were displaced within the municipality during the war but as they have had little involvement with the Serbs they are currently on good terms with the local Albanian population. Many of those who were reportedly complicit in looting seem to have already left. This group were said to be Romany, rather than Albanian-speaking, Roma.

Obilic municipality's 1,500 strong Roma population stayed during the conflict but almost all fled the area (mostly to Kosovo Polje) immediately upon the VJ withdrawal. The shanty town on the outskirts of Obilic town is completely deserted, the houses reportedly burned by the fleeing Roma community. Reported acts of violence against the Roma are few, but this is primarily a reflection of the fact that only a few dispersed families remain. A group of 90 Ashkaelia (Roma-related) remain in Milosevo village but as they are almost fully integrated into the Albanian community they have not really been troubled.

The fate of the Roma population is the most pressing minority issue in Kosovo Polje. By the last week of June 1999, several hundred Roma had left their settlements in Kosovo Polje town and sought shelter at an elementary school in the centre of town. This precipitated the arrival of hundreds of Roma from all of Kosovo so that at one point there was a population of over 5,000 living in squalid conditions. The numbers dropped to around 1,500 following the return of many families to their homes in Kosovo Polje area and the movement of others towards Serbia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. The remaining population is to be moved to a tented site in neighbouring Obilic but their long-term prospects are unclear. These families speak Albanian and their children attended Albanian schools but many are perceived to have taken part in Serb crimes against the Albanian community.

In Mitrovica district, the departure of Yugoslav forces triggered not only a movement of the Serb population but also the departure of the Roma. It is estimated that only 500 of the pre-war 10,000 strong population remain, the rest having sought refuge in Serbia. This community is widely considered to have allegedly been involved in assisting the Serb forces in their acts of destruction. In Mitrovica town, ten families remain in the area close to the Orthodox cemetery and apparently receive close KFOR protection. Another 100 Roma displaced from their quarter, Maja, are now living in the burnt houses of Albanians in the north of the town. A small group of ten have been able to remain in their homes on the road from Mitrovica to Bajgora. All of these groups are suffering persistent harassment (KFOR reported at least three kidnappings) not only from Albanians but also from Serbs who see them as petty criminals.

In Leposavic municipality, a significant Roma population remains in Lesak village while approximately 500 IDPs are housed in the former barracks in the main town itself where they are assisted by the Yugoslav Red Cross. Many of the latter group appear to move back and forth to Serbia. The 200 Roma currently living in a school in Zvecan originate from Mitrovica municipality. Their position is rather difficult as the local community fears them and indeed the Serb Mayor has asked for UNHCR to build a camp to house them. For now they benefit from KFOR patrols but they are keen to return to Mitrovica if their position can be secured.

We are not aware of any Roma in Zubin Potok municipality, whereas in Srbica municipality only two families have been identified in Rudnik village. The few Roma who lived in Srbica town seem to have all left during the war. Vucitrn municipality used to host a Roma population of over 2,000 but most of them have fled and are now to be found in Kosovo Polje and Leposavic. The 20 families remaining in Priluzje village seem to be reasonably secure but an extended family in Vucitrn town are facing regular attacks on themselves and their property.

The numbers of Roma currently in Gnjilane town is estimated at between 200-500. They are concentrated in three neighbourhoods and have no freedom of movement as a result of the threats and arsons to which they have been subjected. Little is known about the remaining Roma community in

Novo Brdo municipality except for reports that about 40 are living in Bostane village in an insecure environment. Before the conflict, the Roma population of Kamenica municipality used to be 1200, of whom 450 lived in Kamenica town. It is estimated that close to 300 Roma have remained in the municipality, 100 in the town.

In Urosevac municipality there is a significant population of around 2,500 Roma, at least half of whom are located in the main town. Due to the intimidation they are facing many of this community are keen to leave. About 100 Roma families are to be found in the town of Lipljan with some others located in Magura village in the municipality. As for Kacanik, only three Roma families are known to still be there. About 100 Roma are known to have recently left Stimlje because of concerns about their safety. Another 100 remain in the homes in the main town where they receive KFOR protection.

An estimated 3-4,000 Roma live in and around Prizren city mostly in the settlements of Terzimahalla, Jenimale, Birorada, Dusanova/Ulcinska and Mother Theresa. They do not face the level of harassment experienced by Serbs and indeed in Terzimahalla they are apparently protected by the KLA. However, in the nearby village of Landovica where a significant Roma population is based, a recent spate of house burning led to the temporary evacuation of 75 people to Prizren. All of this group have now returned following reconciliation talks facilitated by UNHCR and KFOR and an increased KFOR presence.

We are not aware of Roma in Strpce or Gora municipalities but there are a few families left in Suva Reka. Only one out of an original five Roma families has stayed in Siroko village but they are well integrated into the Albanian community. However the eight families (70 people) who remain in Lesane village are subject to minor harassment (the last major incident was a beating reported at the end of June 1999). Nevertheless they wish to stay and do receive support from some of their Albanian neighbours.

In Orahovac, there are several villages with a Roma community. Krusha/Madhe village has a current population of approximately 80 Roma who have not reported any security problems. The few Roma families found in other villages, such as Samodraze and Zrze, appear to be in the same situation.

The town of Djakovica hosts a substantial Roma community of about 5,000. They are located in various neighbourhoods and in a 'camp' of about 900 which has grown up over the last fortnight by a cemetery. The latter population fled from their homes after a spate of arson attacks, beatings and abductions. Despite KFOR presence there harassment continues. Some of this group have admitted to having taken part in looting and it would seem that others who have fled to this site are now considered guilty by association. The situation is increasingly tense, exacerbated by the poor living conditions. This group is adamant that they want to leave Kosovo altogether. The rest of the Roma population in Djakovica wish to stay in their homes despite having suffered abductions, assaults (including a rape), so long as there is adequate KFOR presence. The contrast between their attitude and those of the group above is illustrative of the need to abstain from over-generalising about the situation of the Roma or any other minority in this region.

Of the 200 Roma who are still in Pec municipality, the majority (150) are in the main town. A group of approximately 850, considered to be Serb collaborators, seem to have already left. Nevertheless, Roma continue to leave on a daily basis due to the hostile attitude of part of the Albanian population. According to KFOR, Roma houses are burnt on a nightly basis. However, only Serbs in Pec currently receive 24-hour protection, the Roma being more widely dispersed and more hesitant about asking for assistance.

Scattered Roma communities are thought to reside in neighbouring Klina and Istok municipalities, and it is known that at least several hundred have left for Montenegro over the last few weeks. The difficulties that these communities may be facing are illustrated by the village of Zac where 200 Roma remain. Following several arson attacks, the disappearance of four people and numerous threatening visits by persons identifying themselves as KLA, this community is now under the protection of KFOR who will stay until CIVPOL can take over. UNHCR is facilitating the institution of reconciliation talks between this community and their Albanian neighbours.

Croatian / Bosnian Serbs

Of the 5,400 refugees from Croatia thought to have been present before the war, the majority of them have left spontaneously for Serbia and Montenegro. About 100 congregated in collective centres in Pristina and Kosovo Polje. These groups are particularly vulnerable being firstly Serbs and secondly foreigners. UNHCR has determined that integration into Kosovo society is no longer a durable solution for the majority of this group and so is offering assistance with voluntary repatriation or resettlement. So far 73 have opted for voluntary repatriation while 51 have chosen resettlement. Resettlement will be processed in Romania under the auspices of UNHCR - however, delays in instituting this operation has forced UNHCR to embark on the temporary relocation of this group to Belgrade. The need for such urgent action was illustrated by the abduction in daytime of two refugees from a collective centre in the middle of Pristina on Monday, 12 July 1999.

Pre-war, there were 500 Croatian Serbs in Leposavic municipality (in the main town, Lesak and Socanica) but now the numbers are thought to have been swollen by refugees displaced from other parts of Kosovo. They are being cared for by the local Serb administration and it is hoped that they will soon be interviewed by UNHCR for re-entry into the resettlement/repatriation process. UNHCR will be looking into the reports by KFOR that there are also some Bosnian Serb refugees in this area. We are not aware of any Croatian Serbs remaining in the rest of Mitrovica district. Those that had been living in Velika Reka (Vucitrn) appear to have returned to Croatia - their houses are now occupied by Albanians. Eleven Croatian Serb families (50 people) have been located in Obilic municipality. Although they do not appear to be harassed by the local Albanians, they no longer leave the barracks in which they are housed out of fear of Albanians in the surrounding areas. The 22 Croatian Serb refugees who were in Gnjilane have been brought to Pristina following concerns about their security. 26 of the 50 Croatian Serbs found in Pec have requested transfer to the nearby Serb village of Gorazdevac because they feel unable to move freely. At least 19 other Croatian Serbs are waiting for KFOR to escort them to Montenegro. About 20-30 Croatian Serbs are currently located in Prizren.

Gorani

This community consists of persons of Slav ethnicity from the Goran region who, unlike the Serbs, follow Islam. They are distinct from the group described as Muslim Slavs (see below). Despite their shared religion, their relationship with ethnic Albanians is not always easy given their ethnic and linguistic links with the Serbs, as well as their political attitudes.

Gora municipality is almost entirely populated by Gorani and so the majority face no problems. However, Dragas town is mixed Albanian-Gorani, and although about half of the Gorani population (1,000) left at the time of the Serb military withdrawal, returns are now taking place. Only a few inter-ethnic incidents have been reported but tension exists between the two communities as many Albanians consider the Gorani to have been involved in looting whilst on the other hand many Gorani homes have been occupied by Albanians. However, in neighbouring Prizren, a Goran was murdered and in Suva Reka a Gorani house burnt.

Some 350 Gorani are spread out through Mitrovica town and appear to be tolerated by both the Serb and Albanian communities. Again, the five Goran families who have not left the Kamenica municipality are well integrated into their local community.

Muslim Slavs

This group consists of Slavs who are associated with the "Muslim nationality" created within the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Although many of them describe themselves as Bosnian, this does not necessarily mean that their ancestors were from that geographical area but rather that Bosnians are seen as the successors to the old Muslim nationality group. In reality, these communities originate from a variety of regions, including modern-day Bosnia and Sandzak. Although some are dispersed within towns, most of them live in predominantly Muslim villages. As they speak Serbo-Croat, there is a concern now about preserving their linguistic tradition e.g. in the

schooling of their children. Within the Muslim community, there is a distinct group of Torbesi, found mainly in the Prizren and Orahovac areas.

There appears to be an increase in the number of reported threats against Muslims in Pristina city. About 1,750 Muslims are spread out on both sides of Mitrovica town. Many of them suffered during the war as they were considered to be aligned with the Albanians because of their religion. Large numbers were displaced and are now returning but the security conditions for this community are apparently poor with most of them reportedly living in virtual hiding.

A substantial Muslim Slav community is found in Prizren town; according to community leaders it numbers 20,000. They have suffered intimidation in the form of arson and looting, and it would appear that the women and children face particular harassment because many of them cannot speak Albanian. As mentioned above, in the Zupa area to the east of Prizren, there are seven entirely Muslim villages, Recacne, Gornje Llubinje, Donje Llubinje, Nebregoste, Manastririca, Jablanica and Pouska, as well as several others which are predominantly Muslim (minority Serbian), Planjane, Gornje Selo, Drajcici and Lokvica. In Mushnikovo village (again minority Serb), the 100-strong majority describe themselves as Albanian although they mainly speak Serbo-Croat. This raises the question of whether they are in fact Muslim, a view held by many in the surrounding Muslim community. The overall Muslim population in this area is thought to be around 9,000. Reportedly, these villages have received visits from the KLA requiring the handing over of weapons. An estimated 4-5,000 Muslims are thought to be living in the Podgora region to the south of Prizren in the villages of Ljubidza, Skorobiste, Grncare and Novo Selo.

Gorane in Orahovac municipality had a pre-war population of about 450 Muslims of whom only around 30 have returned (the entire community having apparently fled during the conflict). They have stated that they continue to have good relations with their Albanian neighbours. Although this group are thought to be Torbesi, they seem to wish to identify themselves as Albanians who speak the 'Bosnian' language.

Approximately 4,000 Muslim Slavs have remained in the Pec municipality, mostly in Vitimirica. Good co-operation exists between the Muslim Slavs and Albanians in this area in the form of joint local government and management of humanitarian aid distribution.

Dobrusa village in Istok has a population of about 650 Muslims who returned to their homes in May 1999 after fleeing at the end of March 1999. Although they still appear to be accepted by their Albanian neighbours they have expressed concerns about being mistaken for Serbs by gangs of Albanians from further afield. Although they have suffered some looting and car theft, they do not see this as ethnically-motivated but rather because as a community they are considered to be relatively wealthy.

Turkish

Over the last decade, the Turkish community in Kosovo, who speaks a combination of an Albanian and Turkish dialect, has been steadily declining. This decrease has continued with many members of the Turkish community leaving for Turkey or being otherwise displaced by the recent conflict. However, some families are now returning to Kosovo. We are aware of Turkish communities in Mitrovica and Prizren municipality. Their political leaders wish to retain a neutral position in Kosovo while claiming minority rights for education, employment and media. In Prizren town, plans are being made to transmit Turkish programs on the radio, and Turkish political parties are starting to reestablish offices. No security incidents involving the Turkish community have been reported there. In addition to Prizren town, there is also a Turkish community in Mamusa village in that municipality. 90% of the approximately 5,000 inhabitants of Mamusa are Turks, 7% are Albanians and 2-3% Roma. According to a Turkish representative of the village, there have been no ethnic tensions among the different ethnic groups before and since the war. Only a few security incidents, such as the confiscation of three cars by the KLA, have been reported.

Croats

Janjevo in Lipljan municipality still hosts some 450 Croats who so far have not experienced problems and have in fact co-operated with their Albanian and Roma neighbours in re-establishing their community. Letnice in Vitina municipality is another cultural and religious centre of the Croat minority. In 1990 the village had 4,500 inhabitants, today only about 450 remain, with over 50 having left in the past three months for Croatia following five abductions and one murder. Although there have been no reports of Croats being implicated in war atrocities, the relationship between them and ethnic Albanians is clearly tense. They have expressed concerns about preserving their linguistic identity given that the use of Serbo-Croat could expose them to hostility.

Cerkezi

The Cerkezi arrived in Kosovo from the Kafkaz mountains in Russia more than 80 years ago and settled in Milosevo in Obilic municipality. The Cerkezi are Muslims and speak Albanian, Serbo-Croat and Cerkish. Although in their culture and traditions they seem closer to Albanians than to Serbs, they have always maintained good relations with both communities. During the conflict they were expelled to the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and some of their houses were burned by Serbs. Before the war, there were 100 Cerkezi in Milosevo, now there are 85, after two families left for Russia. The Cerkezi do not seem to be in danger; no security incidents having been reported.

UNHCR / OSCE

26 July 1999

Postscript: In the early evening of 23 July 1999, fourteen Serbs were murdered while harvesting close to their village Malo Gracko, Lipljan municipality.