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The Current Situation of Roma in Kosovo

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The European Roma Rights Center (ERRC) conducted field research in Kosovo during the period June 30-July 7, 1999, in the course of which the ERRC documented numerous abuses, primarily by ethnic Albanians evidently intent on purging Kosovo of Roma in the wake of the withdrawal of Yugoslav forces from the region in early June 1999. Abuses documented include killings of Roma by ethnic Albanians; abduction and illegal detention of Roma by ethnic Albanians; torture, beatings and other physical abuse; rape; expulsions of Roma from homes and communities; house burnings; forced labour; forced entry into Romani houses; and confiscations of houses and other property, all during the period June 16-July 7, 1999. ERRC interviews with local ethnic Albanians elucidated a strong anti-Gypsy sentiment animating many ethnic Albanians in Kosovo. The ERRC has gathered reports of violence and threats of violence against Roma in Kosovo. Most of the Kosovo Roma are presently displaced, both inside and outside Kosovo. Inside Kosovo they are living either in improvised camps in unsanitary conditions or in small enclaves, often together with Serbs, who are also targeted collectively by members of the Albanian majority. In addition, Roma fleeing Kosovo to the Serbian interior of Yugoslavia have been forcibly returned by Yugoslav authorities, which in the circumstances amounts to the grave human rights violation of *refoulement*. The current situation is one of ethnic cleansing of Kosovo Roma and Serbs by ethnic Albanians; instances of pogroms have occurred in some instances and a general threat of pogroms exists. International authorities, and particularly the KFOR, have reacted inadequately, especially to abuses of Roma, and to the evident urgent need for international protection of the Roma in Kosovo.

Killings

A prominent member of the Egyptian¹ community of Djakovica, Mr B.G., reported to the ERRC on July 6 that since the entry of KFOR troops in Kosovo, he has heard reports of three people being abducted and killed by ethnic Albanians in the communities in and around the town. These persons are:

1. Mr Rex Hahxi Shola
2. A man he could identify only as "Bajram"
3. A man he could identify only as "Ruli"

Forcibly displaced Roma interviewed² on July 3 in the Serbian part of Kosovska Mitrovica told the ERRC that they believe that Mr Aziz Azemi, an elderly invalid, probably died in his house when ethnic Albanians burned his house on Fabricka street in Kosovska Mitrovica on or around June 25. The same sources said that they thought Mr Avdush Golubar (60) and his wife Nevzija might also have burned in their house in the same quarter around the same time.

Roma in Prizren reported to the ERRC that ethnic Albanians had killed "an entire family" in recent weeks in the village of Landovica, north-west of Prizren.

Abductions, Disappearances, Kidnap and Detention

The ERRC heard numerous reports of abductions by ethnic Albanians, described either as "KLA" (in and out of uniform) or simply "Albanians"; these take place during the day or night, from houses or off the street. Roma (and "Egyptians") as a group are accused of having looted buildings while the KLA was abroad, or of having collaborated with the Yugoslav army. The ERRC documented detentions in the Romani neighbourhoods of Orahovac; the Terzi Mahala, Dusanova and Durmis Aslano quarters of Prizren, as well as persons abducted from the street in Prizren; the Romani settlement in the village of Velika Krusa; the Egyptian and Romani neighbourhoods of Piskota, Mahala Cerim, Mahala Culit and Mahala Cefes in Djakovica, as well as persons abducted from the street in that town. Roma in the Dusanova settlement in Prizren told the ERRC that local ethnic Albanians now regularly come to the settlement and take women for periods of several hours to perform forced labour; allegations that Roma and Egyptians were made to perform forced labour by Yugoslav police prior to the end of NATO bombing were also heard in Orahovac and Prizren.

The whereabouts of the following persons were, as of July 6, not known to family members or to the ERRC:

According to family members, 27-year-old Mr T.F. was seen by friends of his being kidnapped by KLA members from a main street in Djakovica in broad daylight as he went to work on June 27. He was reportedly seen by another Egyptian man detained by the KLA two days later, apparently unharmed, in detention in a KLA headquarters in the "Junik" building in the centre of the town. On July 2, another Egyptian man detained by KLA and taken to the "Junik" building in Djakovica reportedly saw Mr T.F., again apparently unharmed. The family reported the case to KFOR, who have allegedly taken no action in the case.

According to the testimony of his family members, 21-year-old Mr S.H. disappeared from in front of his house in the Durmis Aslano street in Prizren on or around June 18. His whereabouts as of July 6 were not known.

A Romani man from the town of Orahovac known by the nickname "Skelzen" was reportedly last seen in custody and severely physically abused in a KLA detention centre in a private house in the village of Drenovce on June 30.

Mr H.C. (41), interviewed in his home in Orahovac, told the ERRC that on June 21 uniformed KLA officers abducted five Romani men who are family members of his from their homes in Orahovac. They are Q.C. (19), D.Y. (26), S.R. (35), X.R. (38) and L.B. (48), all from Orahovac. Mr H.C. told the ERRC that he had risked his own safety to go to the local headquarters and inquire about the fate of his relatives. Local KLA officers reportedly told him that they knew nothing about the whereabouts of the men. The ERRC was also told of the abduction of Mr F.R. (19) on June 27 from Orahovac by uniformed KLA. Again, local KLA have reportedly denied all knowledge of his whereabouts.

It was reported to the ERRC that the following sites were, at the time of ERRC field research in Kosovo, used by the KLA as detention centres:

--A school for the deaf and mute in Prizren; KFOR reportedly raided this site on or around July 1 and confiscated weapons from the building; according to testimony provided to the ERRC by Roma in Prizren, it is still being used as a detention centre. A high-ranking KFOR official in the military police in Prizren claimed no knowledge of the centre.

--The "Junik" building in Djakovica;

--A private L-shaped house in the village of Drenovce. There is reportedly a KLA or red Albanian flag flying in front of this house, which is at the back of a vineyard;

Roma state that in larger towns, KLA have established detention centres in public buildings or other prominent sites, while in villages, Roma are brought to private houses when kidnapped.

Torture and Physical Abuse

The number of instances of physical abuse documented by the ERRC are numerous and only an incomplete list is provided here: the ERRC has interviewed victims and eyewitnesses of physical abuse in Djakovica, Gracanica, Kosovo Polje, Kosovska Mitrovica, Prizren, and Velika Krusa. Reports include beatings with fists, iron bars and truncheons and kicking; torture such as forcing individuals to place their feet on a stool while persons identified as "KLA" sit on the legs and beat the soles of the feet; in one instance, the ERRC was told that the victim was subsequently required to stand on one foot at a time for periods of fifteen minutes. In addition, ethnic Albanians have threatened to shoot Roma, to cut or stab them with knives, as well as to kill and mutilate. Abuses take place both day and night, in detention as well as in the houses of the victims.

Mr Z.P. (19), who was, at the time the ERRC interviewed him on July 2, a displaced person in Kosovo Polje, told the ERRC that he was seized and beaten by civilian Albanians in his home town of Pristina while checking the damage to his aunt's house on June 21. They reportedly brought him to the local KLA headquarters. In custody

he was repeatedly beaten by uniformed KLA soldiers and officers. He was threatened with a knife, a pistol and a submachine gun; at one point he was brought to a table which he described as being full of tools "ready for a [surgical] operation". The KLA alleged that he had committed crimes against the Albanians and that he should confess them. He was also shown photographs of approximately 200 persons and asked to identify any of them. He denied having committed any crimes or knowing any of the persons shown in the photographs; he was then beaten further, with blows to the head and kicks to the body. He was released approximately seven hours after the abduction.

The ERRC documented the injuries of 65-year-old Mrs L.L. (65) and also of a nine year old girl named J.Q. in the school Roma camp at Kosovska Mitrovica. The woman and the parents of the child reported that the beating had taken place at the time they were evicted from their homes in the Fabricka street district in Kosovska Mitrovica. Family members of 23-year-old Ms O.N. told the ERRC that after she had been beaten by ethnic Albanians on or around June 26 at the time of their expulsion from their home in Kosovska Mitrovica, Ms O.N. had "stopped talking". The ERRC observed that Ms O.N. appeared to be in apparently psychologically traumatised state at the time of the interview.

On July 3, a 22-year-old Romani man named G.S. in the Dusanova settlement in Prizren told the ERRC that in the first days of the KFOR presence in Kosovo he had been detained by uniformed KLA officers while returning from work and brought to a public building in the centre of Prizren where, between the hours of six and ten in the evening, he was brutally beaten with fists and truncheons by ten KLA officers. He states that there were fifteen other Romani men in custody in the building. KLA officials accused Mr G.S. of having stolen and looted during the Yugoslav military action in Kosovo and demanded to know the whereabouts of Luan Koka, Romani leader from Pristina who attended the negotiations in Rambouillet, France, on the Serb side. Mr G.S. reported that he was "totally black" following the abuse and could not walk. The ERRC noted that three weeks after the incident, bruises were still visible on his arms and torso. He reported that he continued to have pains in his legs and kidneys. He told the ERRC that he knew of four other Romani men in his street alone who had been detained and beaten by ethnic Albanians during the past three weeks.

On July 4, 40-year old Mrs M.L. in the Terzi Mahala neighbourhood of Prizren reported that her son, 22-year-old T.L., had been kidnapped by members of the KLA on June 30, and released following severe abuse. He was reportedly severely injured and immobilised in his home in the village of Velika Krusa. He had reportedly been warned that if he reported the abuse to anyone, the KLA would kill him. Mr T.L. subsequently reported to the ERRC that ethnic Albanians who were not in uniform had detained him, along with his father and sister-in-law at approximately 4:30 in the afternoon on July 2, taken him to a house in the village of Drenovce, where, over a period of three or four hours, they had severely physically abused him. Mr T.L. had visible bruises all over his body, reported pain in his legs, shoulders, back and head, and was unable to walk when interviewed on July 5.

On July 5, 1999, Mr M.L., a Romani man from Terzi Mahala in Prizren told the ERRC that three uniformed KLA officers had come to his home in the afternoon of June 27 and told him to come with them to their headquarters in a school for the deaf and mute in the centre of Prizren. While in detention, fifteen uniformed KLA officers beat him with their fists, with truncheons and with a wooden plank. They interrogated him as to the whereabouts of Luan Koka and as to his own activities during the war. They released him approximately four hours later and threatened him with further abuse if he reported the incident. He reported the incident to KFOR, who subsequently photographed his visible injuries, interviewed him and raided the school, where, according to Mr M.L., they found and confiscated weapons, but no persons in the building. Mr M.L. was confined to bed for seven days and told the ERRC that he was still in pain as of July 5. Mr M.L. told the ERRC that four other Roma in his street in Terzi Mahala had been detained beaten in the past three weeks. Mr M.L.'s mother, Mrs. P.L., told the ERRC that KLA officers had again come to his house to look for him and to order him to report again to the school building on four separate occasions on July 1, but that they had not found him. Mr M.L. is presently in hiding.

Rape

The ERRC interviewed 24-year-old Mr B.K. of the Piskota neighbourhood of Djakovica. He provided the ERRC with eyewitness testimony documenting the rape of his sister and his wife in his home by four armed KLA members in uniform during the night of June 29. On the following morning, the entire family fled to the Dusanova neighbourhood of Prizren, where the ERRC interviewed him on July 3. His present whereabouts are not known, however, since on July 6, a large number of the Roma remaining in the Dusanova settlement fled under threat by Albanian neighbours in surrounding houses that they would burn the settlement to the ground and kill persons remaining in the houses. On July 6, the ERRC again visited the settlement and documented that one house had been burned to the ground during the previous night. When the ERRC visited the settlement again on July 7, it was not possible to enter, since ethnic Albanians surrounded the members of the ERRC, evidently intent on keeping the ERRC from speaking with the few Roma remaining in the settlement. Senior KFOR officials in Prizren told the ERRC that they were unable to protect the settlement, since on one occasion they had been shot at from the windows of the surrounding buildings.

The ERRC interviewed Ms K.F. on July 3, in the improvised "Vuk Karadjic" school refugee camp in Kosovska Mitrovica. She reported that her cousin, 30-year-old Mrs A.D., a mother of two, was raped at approximately 8:00 PM on June 20 in her home in Fabricka street in Kosovska Mitrovica by six uniformed KLA members. The ERRC photographed Mrs A.D. but did not attempt an interview, as members of her family and other camp inmates said that she "had stopped talking". She would also hardly move her eyes or body.

The ERRC also heard allegations of rapes of Egyptian women by ethnic Albanians in the Mahala Lepraven near Djakovica.

Expulsions of Roma

Roma and "Egyptians" throughout Kosovo interviewed during ERRC field research detailed expulsions from homes and communities by ethnic Albanians. Mrs K.Z. (45), interviewed in a school in the village of Gracanin where displaced Roma were staying at the time of the interview on July 3, told the ERRC that she and her family were chased from their home in Urosevac by uniformed and armed KLA men "led by an Albanian neighbour". Mr R.N. (36), also displaced to the improvised camp in Kosovo Polje, accompanied the ERRC to his native village of Crkvena Vodica on July 2. There, the ERRC witnessed around thirty houses burnt or burning. Mr. R.N. told the ERRC that he had fled together with his family on June 25, when around 20 unknown civilians, armed with automatic weapons, rifles and bombs, had come and warned the Roma "to be out by the next day."

Egyptians in the town of Djakovica detailed a pattern of abuse in which ethnic Albanians raided the homes of Egyptian families, terrorized them and then ordered them to leave by morning or be killed. Most of the Egyptians harassed or abused had indeed left Djakovica.

Burning of Romani Houses by Ethnic Albanians

The ERRC documented many cases in which ethnic Albanians set fire to the houses of Roma. Most of these abuses had taken place after June 20; some happened only several hours before the interviews.

Mr G.P. (33), who at the time the ERRC interviewed him on July 2 was a displaced person in Kosovo Polje, brought the ERRC to his still burning house in the Romani quarter of Lozionica in Kosovo Polje. Ethnic Albanians had expelled him and set his house on fire in the morning of the same day. Other Romani houses in that large Romani neighbourhood of around 1500 houses were also on fire at the time of the ERRC visit. KFOR officers were visible on the main road, approximately 500 metres from the neighbourhood, but they did not react.

Mr J.S. (36), a displaced Romani man interviewed on July 2 in an impromptu refugee camp for Roma in Kosovo Polje, told the ERRC that ethnic Albanians had set his house on fire in the village of Subotic in his presence, just after they had expelled him and his family on or around June 26. "We weren't ten steps from the door," he said.

The ERRC also witnessed the pillaging and burning of houses in the Romani quarter of Pristina around Moravska street at around 2:00 PM on July 2. There were at least fifteen teams of persons looting the buildings who appeared to be ethnic Albanians and were also so described by a Romani man from the area. The teams were repeatedly filling trailers pulled by tractors or cars with goods from the abandoned houses. At least ten houses were burning.

The ERRC witnessed one house burnt by ethnic Albanians in the Romani neighbourhood of Dusanova in Prizren at around 11:00 PM on July 5, as well as one house burnt by ethnic Albanians in the Piskota settlement in Djakovica on the night of July 4 at approximately 10:30 PM. In the first case, it was reported to the ERRC by eyewitnesses that three ethnic Albanians dressed in civilian clothes and armed with pistols, entered the house of Ms T.G. in Dusanova, forced a pistol into the mouth of 72-year-old Mr L.R., doused the house with gasoline and set it ablaze. Five Romani persons were reportedly in the house at the time. Mr L.R. suffered a bruised face in the attack. The house was rendered uninhabitable. At approximately 9:30 AM on July 6, KFOR authorities told the ERRC that they had documented the case and called the fire department, who had extinguished the blaze. Roma in the Dusanova settlement subsequently told the ERRC that they had put out the fire themselves and that neither KFOR nor a fire brigade had been to the house. At approximately 11 AM on July 6, while the ERRC was interviewing witnesses to the attack, KFOR troops arrived at the house in Dusanova and began what appeared to be a preliminary investigation. The ERRC visited the house burnt in the Piskota settlement on the night of July 4 in Djakovica and spoke with eyewitnesses, but the inhabitants of the house had already fled the area.

Members of the UN's World Food Program told the ERRC that they had witnessed houses of Roma burning on July 2 in the town of Suva Reka. Eyewitnesses told the ERRC that on July 5, ethnic Albanians had burnt one house in the Romani settlement of Berkoc, near Djakovica and that ethnic Albanians had burned a further three houses in the same settlement on July 6. Roma from Velika Krusa told the ERRC that local ethnic Albanians had burned an unspecified number of houses in that village. The ERRC noted that burning houses were visible at any hour of the day from the main roads linking Kosovo towns.

Forced Entry into Romani Houses

Roma and "Egyptians" in the Durmis Aslano, Dusanova and Terzi Mahala quarters of Prizren and the Piskota settlement in Djakovica told the ERRC that ethnic Albanians had broken into their home repeatedly during the course of the previous three weeks, usually at night; threatened and intimidated Romani and Egyptian inhabitants; and told them that they would kill them if they remained in Kosovo.

Mr L.T., 36 years old, from the Piskota settlement of Djakovica told the ERRC that during the night of July 4, four uniformed KLA officers armed with automatic weapons, knives, iron bars and an axe entered Mr L.T.'s home at around 2:00 AM while Mr L.T. and his family slept, woke him up, and bound his hands. Although the KLA officials told him they had come "from Albania and Pristina", Mr L.T. recognised them as locals. From approximately 2:00 AM until approximately 4:30 AM, KLA officers interrogated Mr L.T. concerning what he had been doing during the war. At one point, KLA officers asked him whether two girls present in the house, one of them fifteen- and the other sixteen-years-old, were married, and two of them accompanied them upstairs, causing Mr L.T. to fear that they would be sexually abused. Mr L.T. states that they were not sexually abused. Mr L.T. told the ERRC that

he fears that he will be killed or expelled, since KLA officials have told other Egyptians in the Piskota quarter "You will be killed" and "We will kill you". The ERRC interviewed victims of similar incidents in the Durmis Aslano, Dusanova and Terzi Mahala quarters in Prizren. Often such incidents are accompanied by physical abuse.

Confiscation of Houses and Other Property, Looting and Plundering

Egyptians in Djakovica told the ERRC that ethnic Albanians had confiscated approximately fifty houses from local Egyptians and Roma in the town, as well as 20-30 cars owned by Roma and Egyptians. According to local Egyptians, ethnic Albanians in Djakovica presently take whatever they like from Roma. Roma in Prizren reported that Albanians had confiscated two houses in the Ortokol neighbourhood and one house in the Dusanova settlement as of July 4. Mr K.C., interviewed in the Romani quarter of Orahovac on July 2, told the ERRC that he had been stopped by six or seven local ethnic Albanians on the street in broad daylight. They reportedly beat him and stole his identity card. Mr K.C. told the ERRC that he believes he would have been abducted, had a KFOR patrol not intervened. Mrs J.K. (58), interviewed in a school in Kosovska Mitrovica inhabited at the time of the interview by displaced Roma, that on June 20 while they were expelling her family from their home, also in Kosovska Mitrovica, ethnic Albanians confiscated a tractor, a car, and a wagon. Confiscations of property such as televisions, stereos, video equipment, refrigerators and, in the words of one Rom in Prizren "anything not nailed down", were reported in many localities visited by the ERRC.

Inadequate Reaction by KFOR ; Lack of Adequate Protection of Roma

ERRC researchers in the British, French and Italian KFOR areas repeatedly witnessed KFOR representatives not reacting in situations of mass or individual looting, carried out openly and in broad daylight. The ERRC has also documented cases of KFOR failing to adequately investigate cases of abduction and the disappearance of persons allegedly arrested by the KLA and to rescue the victims. ERRC researchers in the German and American KFOR areas documented responses by KFOR which remain inadequate due to a lack of troops assigned to civilian policing.

On July 2, at about 2:00 PM, the ERRC visited the Romani quarter of Pristina known as Moravska street. The quarter was empty of its inhabitants. Several houses were burning. There were people about, though, whom a local Romani man identified as ethnic Albanians. These were in plain clothes and unarmed; they seemed to be working in teams, a typical team consisting of two adult men and one or two boys, aged approximately ten to thirteen. The ERRC witnessed these groups bringing pieces of furniture out of abandoned houses and loading it into trailers drawn by light tractors or cars. Approximately fifty meters from this spot stood a British KFOR jeep with four fully armed soldiers. These did not react to the tractors and trailers that had trouble passing them on their way up, empty, or down, full of loot. The ERRC is

unaware of any pronouncements by KFOR authorities to the effect that looting is banned.

The ERRC presented lists of neighbourhoods and streets in Prizren and Djakovica inhabited by significant numbers of Roma and/or Egyptians and therefore in need of special protection, to a senior officer of the KFOR military police in Prizren, Lieutenant Grotzow. Lieutenant Grotzow stated that he was aware of the situation of Roma, but that he did not have enough men; he expected a reinforcement, but even that would not be enough.

Other KFOR officers told the ERRC unofficially that there had been over 250 killings in the German sector alone since the entry of KFOR into Kosovo. They additionally stated that on any given day, 30-150 persons were detained in the military police prison for the crimes of murder, homicide and rape. There is reportedly a "mobile court" established to try persons detained and charged by the KFOR military police, but no KFOR official with whom ERRC spoke was willing to comment on what sentences, if any, had been handed down by the court.

Flight and Internal Displacement

Many Roma have fled Kosovo in recent days. Some of these have left Kosovo; others are internally displaced. The international press has reported large numbers of Roma fleeing Kosovo abroad, most notably the arrival of approximately 700 Roma, most of them from Pec, in the Italian Adriatic port town of Bari on July 6. Roma in Prizren told the ERRC that there are no longer Romani communities in the towns of Pec, Gnjilane and Urosevac. Roma were reportedly fleeing to Serbia, Montenegro and Macedonia. It was later reported to the ERRC that there was at least one Rom left in Urosevac as of July 6, and the ERRC has reason to believe that some Roma may still be present in all three towns. Roma were fleeing into Prizren from Djakovica and the villages around Prizren, since it was the only town in the German and Italian areas which appears to have even a semblance of effective KFOR military police presence. Roma in Prizren have fled the Dusanova settlement for other parts of the city, however, since KFOR is evidently incapable of protecting Roma in Dusanova. No Romani community which the ERRC visited had more than half of its pre-war inhabitants. As of the evening of July 6, the Roma from the settlement of Berkoc--approximately 200 Roma-- were reportedly sleeping in the open near a bridge over the Brekovac river, several kilometres from Djakovica, and were under KFOR protection. At least three persons from the Berkoc settlement had fled to Prizren as of the evening of July 6. A large number of displaced persons from other parts of Kosovo were, as of June 30, reportedly concentrated in Leposavic, a village in northern Kosovo, near the Serbian border. There were reportedly around 2500 displaced persons there, roughly half of them Roma.

ERRC presented a list of areas populated by Roma in the towns of Prizren and Djakovica and therefore in need of special security measures to United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Protection Officer Dietrun Gunther on July 4, 1999. She stated that she was aware of the situation of "minorities", but at the moment

was preoccupied with UNHCR returns of ethnic Albanians from Macedonia and Albania and "spontaneous returns" -- persons returning to Kosovo outside the framework of UNHCR-organized returns -- of ethnic Albanians from those countries in large numbers. Ms Gunther additionally stated that she would begin looking into the situation of Roma on July 6 or July 7, following which she would make recommendations to her superiors in Geneva. The international press reported that Ms Sadako Ogata, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, had on July 7, during a visit to Pristina, stated: "I think the protection of the Roma, the Gypsies, is probably the most difficult and serious problem. The first priority is to protect them where they are. But when we fail in that and want to take them out of the country, we have to make sure that the receiving country has at least some capacity of readiness to help. This has not proven the case in some situations."

Forced Return of Roma to Kosovo by Yugoslav Authorities; Refusal of Yugoslav Authorities to Allow Romani Refugees from Kosovo to Enter Serbia

The ERRC documented cases of the forced return by Serbian authorities of Roma fleeing Kosovo into the Yugoslav interior. As they are fleeing a place where they have reasonable cause to fear for their lives, such returns amount to *refoulement*, a grave violation of international law.³ In other instances, Yugoslav authorities have barred entry to Roma attempting to flee to the Yugoslav interior, leaving them stranded on either side of the Serbian border with Kosovo.

Mrs O.V. (41), interviewed by the ERRC on July 2 in the improvised refugee camp for Roma in Kosovo Polje, told the ERRC that on or around June 22 Yugoslav authorities forcibly returned her and her family of eight to Kosovo from Serbia. The family had taken three days to move from their native village of Crkvena Vodica to Nis. At first they went on foot or traveled in horse-drawn wagons the 110 kilometers distance to Prokuplje in Serbia; there they took a bus to Nis, 25 kilometers further on. They were part of a convoy of seven buses of Serbs and Roma fleeing Kosovo. In Nis, upon arrival, they were met by local authorities who ordered that the buses return to Kosovo. They were then driven to the village of Kosovo Polje, just outside of Pristina. The incident was reported in the British daily *The Guardian* on June 23. They remained displaced in Kosovo Polje at the time the ERRC interviewed them.

Other Roma reported that Serbian authorities have prevented them from entering Serbia. Mr A.U. (25) told the ERRC that on July 1, the same day he was interviewed by the ERRC in Kosovo Polje, authorities had expelled him and his family of thirteen from the village of Lesak in northern Kosovo about 85 kilometers northwest of Pristina, from where they had wanted to proceed to Serbia. He stated that about 1000 people were assembled at Lesak, trying to go further on, but were, at the time he was expelled from Lesak, being prevented by Serbian authorities. In Bujanovac, a village in Serbia on the border with Kosovo about 80 kilometers southeast of Pristina, Serbian authorities are reportedly refusing to allow around 3500 Roma refugees from Kosovo from proceeding further into Serbia.

Conclusions

Roma in Kosovo are in immediate physical danger of attack and pogrom by ethnic Albanians. Abuses of Roma in Kosovo are presently occurring at an alarming rate. The abuses detailed above have taken place and continue to take place in the context of an effective international protectorate over Kosovo and therefore cannot be regarded as the unfortunate events of wartime; they are the failure of legitimate authorities to protect against abuses and to provide remedy when they occur. Measures by KFOR to provide for the protection of Roma have to date proved inadequate, as have measures by the international community to apply available mechanisms of international protection. Indeed, Yugoslav authorities have returned fleeing Roma to the region. Almost all of the Roma with whom the ERRC spoke stated that they wish to leave Kosovo as soon as possible because they fear for their safety. The ERRC therefore calls upon the international community to act swiftly and effectively and adopt the following recommendations:

Recommendations

The ERRC urges KFOR to provide immediate effective protection of the human rights of all inhabitants of Kosovo, regardless of their ethnicity. The ERRC urges that KFOR pay particular attention to the Romani communities in Kosovo and see to it that individual Roma are provided with adequate protection where they live or in the places to which they have fled. The international community must ensure that during the crisis in Kosovo, KFOR is provided with the means and mandate to conduct adequate policing throughout the region. The ERRC urges the international community to provide adequate oversight to ensure that KFOR military police are providing protection to Roma in all KFOR sectors. Allegations of KLA detention centres, killings, rape, torture and other physical abuse, arson, expulsion, looting, theft and other abuses of the rights of Roma should be swiftly investigated and perpetrators brought to justice. Roma wishing to leave Kosovo should be protected on their way through Kosovo. They should also be assisted in finding a safe haven outside Yugoslavia.⁴ Roma currently outside Kosovo should not be pressured to return to their homes in Kosovo by any authority, since the security situation is hazardous.

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The *European Roma Rights Center* is an international public interest law organisation which monitors the situation of Roma in Europe and provides legal defence in cases of human rights abuse. ERRC reports and other information concerning the organisation's activities are available on Internet at errc.org

Notes

¹ "Egyptians" in Kosovo are a group of people who call themselves so; by most people outside of that group they are usually referred to as "Gypsies". Especially members of the ethnic Albanian majority.

who tend to accuse "Gypsies" in general of various crimes, do not differentiate between them and the "Egyptians".

² The identity of the sources and victims mentioned is known to the ERRC. They are withheld here for their protection.

³ See Article 33, the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees: "Prohibition of expulsion or return (refoulement)". SFRY to which the FRY is the legal heir signed the convention in 1951 and ratified it in 1959.

⁴ It has been suggested that some war criminals might still be hiding among the innocent. That suggestion, highly improbable at this late stage, is balanced by the well-founded contention that nobody accused by the Kosovo Albanians has at present the chance of a fair trial in Kosovo. As to the dangers of improvised camps outside of Kosovo, such dangers are negligible in comparison to the dangers of the existing improvised camps *in* Kosovo, coupled with the current probability of pogroms.