

Serbien - Montenegro (31)



29/9-04

Serbia and Montenegro

International Religious Freedom Report 2004

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor

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The Constitution and laws of the state union of Serbia and Montenegro and its constituent republics provide for freedom of religion, and state union and republic Governments generally respect this right in practice. There is no state religion in Serbia and Montenegro; however, the majority Serbian Orthodox Church receives some preferential consideration.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report and government policy contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

There were some instances of discrimination and acts of societal violence directed against representatives of religious minorities in Serbia and Montenegro. The worst vandalism during the period covered by this report was the burning of two mosques, in Nis and Belgrade, in reaction to violence against Serbs during March riots in Kosovo. The Jewish community in Serbia reported an increase in anti-Semitic hate speech and threats on the Internet during the period covered by this report. Leaders of minority religious communities often relate acts of vandalism to negative media reporting labeling them as "sects." Police and government officials have taken some positive steps in response to acts of hate speech and vandalism.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the state union and republic Governments as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. Embassy representatives meet regularly with representatives of ethnic and religious minorities as well as with government representatives to promote respect for religious freedom.

Section I. Religious Demography

The state union of Serbia and Montenegro (excluding U.N.-administered Kosovo) has a total land area of nearly 35,300 square miles and a population of approximately 8,186,000. Religion plays a small but growing role in public life. The predominant faith in the country is Serbian Orthodoxy. Approximately 78 percent of the citizens of Serbia and Montenegro, including most ethnic Serbs and Montenegrins who profess a religion, are Serbian Orthodox. The Muslim faith is the second largest in Serbia and Montenegro, with approximately 5 percent of the population, including Slavic Muslims in the Sandzak, and ethnic Albanians in Montenegro and southern Serbia. Roman Catholics make up about 4 percent of the population of Serbia and Montenegro, mostly Hungarians in Vojvodina, ethnic Albanians in Montenegro, and Croats in Vojvodina and Montenegro. Protestants make up about 1 percent of the population and include Adventists, Baptists, Reformed Christians, Evangelical Christians, Evangelical Methodists, Jehovah's Witnesses, the Church of Christ, Pentecostals, and members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Serbia and Montenegro has a small and aging Jewish population numbering a few thousand. The remainder of the population professes other faiths or considers itself atheists. According to Montenegro's 2003 census, almost 70 percent of its population is Orthodox, 21 percent is Muslim, and 4 percent is Catholic.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution and laws of the state union of Serbia and Montenegro and its constituent republics provide for freedom of religion, and the Governments generally respect this right in practice. The Governments at all levels strive to protect this right in full and do not tolerate its

abuse, either by governmental or private actors. There is no state religion in Serbia and Montenegro; however, the Montenegrin Republic's Constitution mentions the Orthodox Church, Islamic Religious Community, and Roman Catholic Church by name. The majority Serbian Orthodox Church receives some preferential consideration.

The requirement for religious groups to register lapsed when the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY), predecessor of the state union of Serbia and Montenegro, ceased to exist in February 2003. By the end of the period covered by this report, there was no formal registration of religions in either republic. However, to gain the status of a juridical person necessary for real estate and other administrative transactions, religious groups may register as citizen groups with the Ministry of Interior in their home republic.

Religious education in Serbian primary and secondary schools continued during the period covered by this report. According to a 2001 Serbian government regulation, students are required either to attend classes from one of the seven "traditional religious communities" (Serbian Orthodoxy, Islam, Roman Catholicism, the Slovak Evangelical Church, Judaism, the Reform Christian Church, or the Evangelical Christian Church), or they can elect to substitute a class in civic education. The proportion of students registering for religious education grew during the period covered by this report, but registrations for civic education courses continued to predominate. Some Protestant leaders and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in Serbia continued to voice their objection to the teaching of religion in public schools, as well as to proposals that would officially classify some of Serbia's religions as traditional.

There was no progress noted during the period covered by this report on restitution of previously seized church property. There were indications that restitution of religious property would be addressed in Serbia by a wider law on restitution of nationalized private property. Montenegro's Law on Restitution, enacted early this year, does not cover religious property; restitution of religious property will be addressed in a special law on the subject, but no timetable exists for its enactment.

In February, Catholic Priest Don Branko Sbutega publicly opposed Government construction of a World Bank-funded waste disposal site in Lovanja, near Kotor, Montenegro. He claimed that the Government violated property rights of citizens and the Catholic Church, which had title to part of the land. Local media reports alleged the Government concealed improper legal documentation for the site to avoid losing World Bank funding. Although this issue remained unresolved at the end of the period covered by this report, construction continued.

While municipal governments in Serbia at times fund rehabilitation of historical religious property of various faiths, the Serbian Government also is funding construction of one religious building—a large Serbian Orthodox Church—through a requirement for an additional postage stamp. After the widespread destruction of the Church's property in Kosovo in March, the Serbian Government decided to subsidize salaries of Orthodox clergy in Kosovo.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Office of Religious Affairs of the state union's Ministry of Human and Minority Rights, an interlocutor with minority religious groups, has not obtained satisfactory government action in response to reports of vandalism and other societal acts against these groups. However, representatives of minority religious communities reported good relations with this office.

There is no chaplain service in the armed forces. Although local Serbian Orthodox priests are the only clergy offering religious services at armed forces chapels, members of the armed forces of other faiths can attend religious services outside their barracks and spend important religious holidays with their families. Due to cost considerations, the Army has not yet implemented plans to meet dietary requirements of Islamic soldiers, which would require separate kitchens.

The Belgrade Islamic community reported continued difficulties in acquiring land and government approval for an Islamic cemetery near the city.

The Montenegrin Government challenged a decision by the Ministry of Defense of the former Federal Republic of Yugoslavia to transfer military property to the majority Serbian Orthodox Church in March 2003. Montenegrin officials claim the transfer was an illegal attempt to prevent the republic Government from obtaining this property when the federal state was dissolved and replaced by the state union of Serbia and Montenegro. The case remained unresolved by the end of the period covered by this report.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

A long-running dispute between the southern Serbian city of Leskovac and a tent church used by the Protestant Evangelical Roma Church expanded on April 30 when building inspectors, three police cars, an electrical distribution company crew and a demolition team arrived to demolish the church. The tent church had been singled out for demolition although all 463 structures in the area, including an industrial plant and many houses, were illegal. Worshipers prevented the demolition, and the city later that day agreed to allow relocation of the tent church. As part of the agreement, the city offered to provide for free a 22,000-square-meter site in an industrial zone, as well as electricity, water, sewage, and an asphalt road for the site. The church was required to purchase one of the two adjacent privately owned sites to facilitate road access. The church agreed with the owner of one of the adjacent sites and acquired the necessary funding, but the municipality's ownership department has required opinions from Serbia's Ministries of Religion and Building before approving the sale. The sale had not been completed by the end of the period covered by this report.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners.

Forced Religious Conversions

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States; nor were there reports of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

The state union Government has implemented civilian service as an alternative to mandatory army service. Civilian service options complement the nonlethal options already present for conscripts who object to military service for reasons of conscience. There are no reports of religious adherents serving sentences for conscientious objection to the draft.

In 2002, Serbian courts began proceedings in the Savic case, in which an author of anti-Semitic literature was tried for spreading racial or national hatred through the printed word. According to sources in the Jewish community of Serbia and Montenegro, a number of continuances have been issued in this trial. The latest continuance, granted to allow for a psychiatric examination of the defendant, had been ongoing for over a year at the end of the period covered by this report.

Section III. Societal Attitudes

While relations between members of different religious groups are good, there were some instances of discrimination against representatives of religious minorities in the country. Religion and ethnicity are intertwined closely throughout Serbia and Montenegro, and in many cases it is difficult to identify discriminatory acts as primarily religious or primarily ethnic in origin. A number of the incidents of religious discrimination or harassment that occurred during the period covered by this report appear to have been based more on ethnicity than on religion.

After the December 28, 2003, parliamentary elections—in which the Serbian Radical Party rebounded by taking a plurality of seats—there was an upsurge in vandalism and violence against minority ethnic and religious groups in the northern Serbian province of Vojvodina. Among the incidents that targeted religious sites or adherents were: (1) the January 19

desecration of a Hungarian Catholic cemetery in Novi Sad; (2) the January 19 desecration of a Reformist church in Sombor; (3) the January 24 desecration of a Croatian Catholic cemetery in Subotica; (4) the desecration of another Subotica graveyard, where Croats and Bunjevci (both Catholic groups) are buried, on the night of March 26-27; (5) the desecration of 21 gravestones in the Catholic and Orthodox graveyard in Novi Becej between May 1 and 2; and (6) an attack in Novi Sad on two Christian Adventist priests who were trying to defend church members from six youths who entered the church after evening services and began cursing and shouting. One of the attackers grabbed a priest by the neck and then attacked the other priest. Police were called and arrested the attackers. The investigation of this incident is ongoing. One violent incident that predated the parliamentary elections was the August 8, 2003, attack on a music concert organized by the local Church of God Pentecostal in Vrdnik in Vojvodina. A power line for the concert was cut with an axe, and an explosive device was thrown near the stage, damaging nearby cars. Police investigated the incident, but they have not identified the perpetrators.

In reaction to widespread violence by ethnic Albanians against Serbs and their personal and religious property in Kosovo on March 17, there were protests and violence in Serbia and Montenegro beginning on the night of March 17-18. This reaction included violence against Muslim religious sites in Serbia and Montenegro, although the sites belonged primarily to Bosniak, not ethnic Albanian, Muslims.

During the night of March 17-18, the Belgrade mosque was looted and set on fire by a mob of thousands of youths, reportedly mostly from Belgrade's sports clubs, who went to the mosque after demonstrating in front of the Serbian Government building. The first police officers to respond to the mosque created a cordon around it, but they were equipped inadequately and the mob pushed them aside; some officers were injured. Officers who arrived later were better equipped, but they did not confront the mob. Two fire trucks arrived nearby before the mosque was set on fire, but firefighters did not attempt to get to the mosque when the arson occurred, although they did reach the mosque about 2 hours later. The mosque was damaged, but it remained structurally sound; however another building on the compound was destroyed. Six cars, including three police cars, also were destroyed. Serbian Orthodox Metropolitan Amfilohije and some followers vigorously attempted to protect the mosque. Government and political leaders condemned the attack, and the Interior Minister later fired the police commander of the Stari Grad neighborhood where the mosque is located for inadequate police response. The Belgrade and Stari Grad Governments each have pledged \$34,480 (2 million dinars) to repair the mosque. (Reconstruction of the mosque facade, already on the Belgrade City planned rehabilitation list, was moved to the top of the list after the attack.) Police arrested 110 persons for the attack. Shortly after a radio station carried the address of a Muslim boy who was injured when he fell from the roof of the mosque during the rioting, an explosive device was thrown at his house. Later the same night, a mob broke windows at the U.S. Embassy and damaged two Embassy vehicles; it also attacked the Croatian Embassy. The mob was prevented from reaching the Albanian Embassy, which is in a remote location.

The same night, the mosque in the southern Serbian city of Nis was set on fire. Although police and firefighters soon arrived, the thousands of rioters surrounding the building prevented their approaching the mosque, which, along with the minaret, was gutted. Eleven persons have been charged in the attack with "joining together for violent activity," which carries a sentence of up to 5 years in prison. Nis municipality has pledged to refurbish the mosque completely.

Attacks also took place against Muslim property in Serbia's northern province of Vojvodina in reaction to the Kosovo events. The Helsinki Committee of Serbia noted 40 attacks between March 17 and 21 against property owned by Albanian and Bosniak Muslims in Vojvodina. Also, in the western Serbian town of Mali Zvornik, mosque windows were broken with stones on March 20.

In Bar, Montenegro, an Islamic community bookstore was stoned on March 20; the offenders had not been found by the end of the period covered by this report. The same day, police detained 10 young men in Podgorica, Montenegro who threatened to set fire to Podgorica's main mosque. Police questioned the youths in the presence of their parents and released them; no legal action was planned out at the end of the period covered by this report.

There was also an attack against at least one non-Muslim religious site, apparently in reaction to the events in Kosovo. On the evening of March 18, a Protestant Bible Cultural Center in Nis was burned by a mob of 30 persons that threw Molotov cocktails.

Minority religious communities report continued problems with vandalism of church buildings, cemeteries, and other religious premises. According to the Forum 18 News Service, more than 50 attacks occurred during the period covered by this report. Many of the attacks involved spray-painted graffiti, rock throwing, or the defacing of tombstones, but a number of cases involved more extensive damage. There were a number of incidents in which gravestones were desecrated, including those in Jewish, Islamic, and Lutheran cemeteries. On April 27, the Catholic Church of Sveti Matej in Kotor, Montenegro, was defaced with an image of three raised fingers—a sign of Serbian nationalism—and graffiti reading, "This church should be burnt down," and "Serbia." The former synagogue of Nis, Serbia, was defaced with a swastika and graffiti reading "Serbia for the Serbs" and "skinheads."

Jewish leaders in Serbia reported a continued increase in anti-Semitism on the Internet. According to representatives of the Union of Jewish Communities of Serbia and Montenegro, anti-Semitic hate speech often appears in small-circulation books. The release of new books (or reprints of translations of anti-Semitic foreign literature) often leads to a spike in hate mail and other expressions of anti-Semitism. These same sources associated anti-Semitism with anti-Western and antiglobalization sentiments, as well as nationalism.

Antisect propaganda continued in the Serbian press, which labels minority Christian churches—including Baptists, Adventists, and Jehovah's Witnesses—and some other minority faiths "sects." Religious leaders have noted that instances of vandalism often occur soon after press reports on sects. In July the periodical *Nin* published a special supplement entitled "Sects—Spiritual Drug" funded by the Karic Foundation; the supplement contained articles on the dangers of various minority religions. The daily *Novosti* ran a series of antisect articles, beginning in February. According to some sources, the fact that one of Serbia's leading experts on sects is a police captain whose works are used in military and police academies further complicates this situation.

In Montenegro, the Catholic, Muslim, and Orthodox communities coexist within the same towns and often use the same municipally owned properties to conduct worship services. Tensions continued between the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Montenegrin Orthodox Church. These tensions are largely political, stemming from Montenegro's periodic drive for independence that started in 1997. Nevertheless, the Montenegrin Orthodox Church remains schismatic in the eyes of official Orthodoxy. One focus of controversy continued to be the Berane Yule log ceremony. During the period covered by this report, Montenegrin Orthodox and Serbian Orthodox believers in several municipalities, including Berane, burned their Yule logs in separate locations. The Montenegrin Orthodox Church in Bijelo Polje decided not to hold the ceremony. Municipal authorities in Bar were reluctant to allow Yule Log burning for security reasons, but did not stop the ceremonies. The two churches continue to contend for adherents and to make conflicting property claims, but this contention has not been marked by violence. However, NGO representatives reported concern at the level of nationalism and hate speech in Montenegro. Members of minority religious communities in Montenegro also reported being labeled "sects" and "cults" in the media.

In May, the landlord of a building used by a Protestant denomination in Montenegro requested the church to remove a sign from the building announcing dates and times of services. Missionaries of the denomination, which wishes to remain anonymous, recently reported that in 2002 their mission's car was firebombed. Local police responded quickly to the incident, but the perpetrators have not been found.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government continues to promote ethnic and religious tolerance throughout Serbia and Montenegro. Embassy officials meet regularly with the leaders of religious and ethnic minorities, as well as with representatives of the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Government to promote the respect of religious freedom and human rights. These representations have included meetings with Serbian Prime Minister Vojislav Kostunica, Serbian President-elect Boris Tadic, Serbian Interior Minister Dragan Jovic, and Serbia and Montenegro Minister for Human and Minority Rights Rasim Ljajic. Embassy Officials urged these leaders to speak out against incidents targeting ethnic minorities (including their places of worship and cemeteries) and to find and punish the perpetrators.

KOSOVO

Kosovo continued to be administered under the civil authority of the U.N. Interim Administrative Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), pursuant to U.N. Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1244. This resolution called for "substantial autonomy and meaningful self-administration" for the persons of Kosovo "within the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia." UNMIK and its chief administrator, the Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG), established a civil administration in 1999, following the conclusion of the NATO military campaign that forced the withdrawal of Yugoslav and Serbian forces from Kosovo. Since that time, the SRSG and UNMIK, with the assistance of the international community, have worked with local leaders to build the institutions and expertise necessary for self-government under UNSCR 1244.

The UNMIK-promulgated Constitutional Framework provides for freedom of religion, as does UNMIK Regulation 1999/24 on applicable law in Kosovo; UNMIK and the provisional institutions of self-government (PISG) generally respected this right in practice. The number of attacks by Kosovo Albanians against Kosovo Serbs, which peaked following the NATO campaign in 1999, decreased during the period covered by this report; however, incidents peaked again during riots from March 17-19 that were sparked by events during a time of general discontent concerning UNMIK involvement in Kosovo. The March riots resulted in the deaths of 19 persons, numerous injuries, and widespread property damage connected with ethnic minorities, including 30 Serbian Orthodox churches, monasteries and cemeteries and over 900 homes.

Prior to the March riots, the status of respect for religious freedom had improved somewhat during the period covered by this report, with attempts by Kosovo leaders to include the Serbian Orthodox minority. However, ethnic tensions between Kosovo's Albanians and Serb populations remained noticeable throughout the period covered by this report and significantly increased in March. Most of these tensions were largely rooted in ethnic, rather than religious, bias. Prior to the March riots, a few Orthodox religious sites were attacked, presumably by ethnic Albanian extremists, but the number of such attacks had decreased. Until March, the protection of Serbian Orthodox churches and other religious symbols continued to be transferred from the NATO-led Kosovo Force (KFOR) to U.N. international police (CIVPOL) and the Kosovo Police Service (KPS); however, following the March riots, this transfer was halted and KFOR increased the number of checkpoints. Since the March riots, Kosovo leaders, with prompting by internationals, sought to address the concerns of persons displaced by the violence and agreed to cooperate with religious site reconstruction.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with UNMIK, the PISG, and religious representatives in Kosovo as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Government also supports UNMIK and KFOR in their security and protection arrangements for churches and patrimonial sites. U.S. Office Pristina and USKFOR's activities during the March riots helped by halting further escalation, resulting in several religious sites being saved from looting and burning.

Section I. Religious Demography

Kosovo has a total land area of approximately 4,211 square miles and its population is approximately 2 million. Islam is the predominant faith, professed by most of the majority ethnic Albanian population, the Bosniak, Gorani, and Turkish communities, and some in the Roma/Ashkali/Egyptian community, although religion is not a significant factor in public life. Religious rhetoric is largely absent from public discourse, mosque attendance is low, and public displays of conservative Islamic dress and culture are minimal. The Kosovo Serb population, of whom about 100,000 reside in Kosovo and 225,000 in Serbia and Montenegro, are largely Serbian Orthodox. Approximately 3 percent of ethnic Albanians are Roman Catholic. Protestants make up less than 1 percent of the population but have small populations in most of Kosovo's cities.

Foreign clergy actively practice and proselytize. There are Muslim, Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant missionaries active in Kosovo. There are approximately 64 faith-based or religious organizations registered with UNMIK who list their goals as the provision of humanitarian assistance or faith-based outreach.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

In May 2001, UNMIK promulgated the Constitutional Framework for Provisional Self-

Government in Kosovo (the "Constitutional Framework"), which established the PISG and replaced the UNMIK-imposed Joint Interim Administrative Structure. Following November 2001 central elections, the 120-member Kosovo Assembly held its inaugural session in December 2001. In March 2002, the Assembly selected Kosovo's President, Prime Minister, and Government. Since that time, UNMIK has transferred most of the authority authorized by the Constitutional Framework to the PISG, while retaining authority in such areas as security and protection of communities.

Kosovo's Constitutional Framework incorporates international human rights conventions and treaties, including those provisions that protect religious freedom and prohibit discrimination based on religion and ethnicity; UNMIK and PISG generally respect this right in practice. UNMIK, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and the PISG officially promote respect for religious freedom and tolerance in administering Kosovo and in carrying out programs for its reconstruction and development.

UNMIK recognizes as official holidays some, but not all, religious holy days of the Muslim, Catholic and Orthodox faiths.

There are no specific licensing regulations with regard to religious groups; however, to purchase property or receive funding from UNMIK or other international organizations, religious organizations must register with UNMIK as nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Religious leaders have complained that they should have special status apart from that of NGOs. The Kosovo Prime Minister's Office established a working group to draft a law on religious freedom and legal status of religious communities in Kosovo, with the first meeting held in July 2003. The group consists of representatives of religious groups in Kosovo; however, Serbian Orthodox representatives have thus far declined to participate. This decision reflects the Kosovo Serb political leadership's belief that any Kosovo Serb participation legitimizes Kosovo Albanian institutions. The working group continues to provide Serbian Orthodox representatives with drafts of the law. The group is currently on the third draft of the law, with additional work to be done before the final version is sent to the Kosovo Assembly and the SRSG for approval.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

UNMIK, the PISG, and KFOR policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion; however, the Kosovo Islamic Community has at times publicly complained that Kosovo lacks genuine religious freedom, citing as examples UNMIK's refusal to provide radio frequencies for an Islamic radio station and the closing of a prayer room in the National Library by the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology. The same community has also complained that although 32 acres have been allocated for building a Catholic cathedral in the municipality of Pristina, the Pristina Municipal Assembly refuses to grant their request for allocation of space for new mosques. There have been some complaints by Kosovar Muslim leaders that they are not consulted prior to registration of foreign Islamic NGOs with UNMIK.

At the end of the period covered by this report, various groups released reports analyzing the performance of KFOR, CIVPOL, and KPS during the March riots and the future role of each entity. Serbian Orthodox priest Father Sava said that "everything failed" regarding the protection of religious sites during the March riots. In its latest report, "Human Rights Challenges Following the March Riots," the OSCE Mission in Kosovo stated that UNMIK, KFOR and KPS could have done more to protect minorities in the period following the March riots. The report declared that KPS needed to become a more effective, accountable, and human rights compliant police force and asserted that despite the political progress since the March violence, a safe environment for Kosovo Serbs remained elusive.

With the exception of Prime Minister Bajram Rexhepi, most political leaders were criticized for not doing enough to stop the violence during the March riots and for being slow to respond after the riots. However, Kosovo political leaders—including Kosovo government officials and political party leaders—have increasingly called publicly for tolerance.

In December, the media openly debated the pros and cons of wearing the traditional Islamic headscarf, spurred by two separate events. The media reported that a Kosovo Government delegation, on a trip to Germany, complained that the interpreter provided to them wore a headscarf. Consequently a part of the delegation did not want to attend scheduled meetings. The other event involved a student who was told by the principal of the high school that she

could not wear a headscarf to school.

In the fall of 2003, the principal of the Pristina secondary school "Naim Frasheri" banned a student from wearing a headscarf on the school premises, and the student appealed to the Kosovo Ombudsperson. The Ministry of Education's position was that the education law stated public education institutions must refrain from activities promoting any specific religion. The student continued to attend the school wearing a headscarf, yet the principal's decision remained unchanged. On June 4, the Ombudsperson released a nonbinding opinion that the Ministry's interpretation should only apply to school teachers or officials, not students, and students should be able to wear the headscarf to school.

In June 2003, an Islamic-oriented Kosovo Albanian political party with a seat in the Kosovo Assembly undertook an initiative to install religious teaching in schools; this initiative faced resistance from many within the Assembly and did not reach the Assembly agenda.

Although they claim the situation has slightly improved, Protestants still report discrimination in media access, particularly by the public Radio and Television Kosovo (RTK).

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the government authorities' refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

On August 19, 2003, the Kosovar media reported that two Christians in Ferizaj complained to the police that three individuals threatened them with "consequences" if they did not convert to Islam. The police in Ferizaj stated that the dispute was between family members; the brother and nephew of a young woman told her to convert from Christianity back to Islam. It is unclear whether these individuals were affiliated with a government organization.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

One of the most serious challenges facing the international community in its administration of Kosovo has been to stop ethnically motivated attacks on Serbian Orthodox churches and shrines and on the Orthodox population of Kosovo. Prior to the March riots, KFOR and UNMIK international police, with increasing participation of the Kosovo Police Service, reduced the number of crimes against Orthodox persons and sites; however, there have been few convictions of those who perpetrated attacks prior to March.

The number of attacks on Serbian Orthodox churches continued to decrease during the period covered by this report; however, during the March riots, 30 Orthodox religious sites and over 900 homes and businesses of ethnic minorities were burned or damaged. Members of the PISG and some political leaders made efforts to communicate with the Kosovo Serbs and Serbian Orthodox officials and expressed a public commitment to assist in their return and the reconstruction of damaged or destroyed churches. Following the March 17 and 18 riots, on April 2, Kosovo Albanian leaders issued another public letter, condemning the violence and calling for building of the tarnished interethnic relations. Although on April 15 Kosovo Prime Minister inaugurated the first rebuilt Kosovo Serb homes in Pristina, damaged during the March riots, the European Union and NATO have criticized the PISG for being slow to rebuild the razed homes. As of June 30, according to UNMIK, 70 persons were convicted and a further 270 persons have cases pending in the courts in relation to the March riots.

In July 2003, key Kosovar Albanian, Turk, Bosniak, Roma and Ashakli leaders issued a public letter calling on Kosovo Serbs to return home. This letter was supported by the Kosovo Assembly's July 10 recommendations and coincided with the first-ever joint Kosovo President's and the head of the second-largest Kosovo Albanian political party's meeting of Kosovo Serbs

in Ferizaj. An important event was also the beginning of Belgrade-Pristina dialogue on technical matters in October 2003 in Vienna, which was followed by the first technical groups meeting in Pristina on March 4. The Kosovo Prime Minister called on Kosovo Serbs for cooperation, such as the January 12 appeal to the Kosovo Serbs to join the "Standards for Kosovo" policy, and was widely praised for his attempts to stop the March riots. Nevertheless, the UN stated that approximately 2,400 Serbs and other Kosovo minorities had not returned to their homes 3 months after the ethnic Albanian riots.

Although Protestants were not initially included in the Working Group established by the Kosovo Government to draft a law governing the legal status of religious communities, they were later invited during the period covered by this report to join and provide input as an equal partner with other religions.

Section III. Societal Attitudes

Ethnicity and religion are closely entwined in Kosovo. While most Kosovo Albanians identify themselves as Muslim, the designation has more of a cultural than religious connotation. Kosovo Serbs identify themselves with the Serbian Orthodox Church, which defines not only their religious but also their cultural and historical perspectives. During and after the 1999 conflict, some Serbian Orthodox leaders played a moderating political role, but most have since withdrawn from political life as secular Serb leaders have stepped forward, especially following the November 2001 elections and subsequent establishment of Kosovo's Provisional Institutions. At the beginning of March, Raska-Prizren Bishop Artemije Radosavljevic resigned from his semi-political position as the president of the Serbian National Council for Kosovo.

Societal violence continued during the period covered by this report. Of 109 killings in Kosovo from July 2003 through June 30, there were 24 Serb victims, including the 8 Serb victims of the March riots; although none of these killings is believed to have been religiously motivated, there were some reported incidents of rock-throwing and other assaults against Serbian Orthodox clergy, and monks and nuns at some monasteries reportedly remained unable to use parts of the monasteries' properties due to concerns about safety.

On May 31, the media reported that an imam, after receiving an invitation to perform a religious ceremony in the village of Stublla, was kidnapped and assaulted by masked assailants. The imam escaped with minor injuries. The motives behind the alleged attack are unknown and an investigation is ongoing at the end of the period covered by this report.

Security concerns had a chilling effect on the Serb community and its freedom of movement and also affected their freedom to worship, particularly after the March riots. Some Kosovo Serbs have asserted that they were not able to travel freely to practice their faith due to security concerns. Serb families with relatives living in both Kosovo and Serbia were restricted by security concerns from traveling for religious holidays or ceremonies, including weddings and funerals. At the end of the period covered by this report, Bishop Artemije Radosavljevic, the head of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Kosovo, remained in a monastery in the Serbian enclave of Gracanica rather than return to the diocesan seat in Prizren; the Bishop's residence was among the religious sites burned and destroyed during the March riots. Like most Serb leaders, Bishop Artemije traveled under armed security escort. Freedom of movement suffered some setbacks following the March riots, but in general has improved since 2003, particularly in Eastern Kosovo.

Attacks on Serbian Orthodox religious sites, presumably by ethnic Albanian extremists, continued during the period covered by this report, although these incidents had decreased prior to the March riots. There were incidents of vandalism at religious sites. At St. Nicholas Church in Prizren, the priest claimed that after the KFOR static checkpoint was removed in 2003, the church was attacked several times, including an incident in July 2003 when the church's windows were broken. The media reported that on September 19, the St. Petka church in the village of Laplje Selo was broken into and vandalized, and objects were stolen; on September 24, a similar incident occurred at the St. Nedelja church in Brnjaca village. In January, the Orthodox leadership reported the burning of the bell tower of Stimje church.

Most serious of all incidents were the March 17-19 riots, which occurred simultaneously throughout Kosovo and left 19 persons dead, including 8 Kosovo Serbs, and more than 900 injured. The protests were sparked by events during a time of general discontent concerning

UNMIK involvement in Kosovo. On March 15, a Serb was shot allegedly by Albanian youths and Serb protestors blocked the main commercial road, and on March 16 three Albanian children drowned in the Ibar River, which the media alleged was caused by Serbs chasing the children. The resulting 3 days of riots resulted in intensive property damage including the destruction or damage of 30 Orthodox religious sites and more than 900 houses and businesses of ethnic minorities.

Many of the churches and monasteries burned were constructed in the 14th century and considered part of the cultural and religious heritage of the Serbs. Father Sava, of the Decan monastery, provided a comprehensive list of religious sites destroyed or damaged between March 17 and 19. The list included 33 sites altogether in the following 14 locations: Prizren, Rahovec, Gjakova, Skenderaj, Peja, Ferizaj, Kamenica, Shtime, Pristina, Fushe Kosove, Vushtri, Obiliq, Mitrovica, Podujevo. A Council of Europe mission to assess the damage concluded that approximately \$11.83 million (9.7 million euros) would be required to repair and restore the damaged sites.

In addition problems with the unfinished Serbian church located on University of Pristina grounds continued. In April 2003, the Student Union leader at Pristina University called for the removal of the unfinished church. The Education Ministry later requested that the Pristina municipality authorities fence off university grounds and indicated that all nonuniversity buildings—including the church—should be removed. The land on which the church sits was given to the Serbian Orthodox Church by the Serb-dominated administration in Pristina during the 1990s. On December 30, the Pristina Municipal Assembly passed a resolution to return the land to the University. The UNMIK representative in the Pristina municipal government immediately suspended this decision, and no further action was taken. The media reported that Roma from Albania were squatting around the unfinished church for several months until they were removed in April after Orthodox leaders sent an open letter to the SRSG complaining of the situation.

In light of societal violence in Kosovo against properties owned by the Serbian Orthodox Church and Serbian Orthodox religious symbols, UNMIK authorities continued to provide special security measures to protect religious sites and to ensure that members of all religious groups could worship safely. KFOR deployed security contingents at religious sites throughout Kosovo to protect them from further destruction, such as that which had occurred immediately after KFOR's intervention in 1999; however, KFOR gave priority to saving persons' lives rather than property and was unable to stop the burning and destruction of many sites in March. Due to improving security conditions and decreasing interethnic tensions in some areas, KFOR removed static checkpoints from most churches and religious sites during the period covered by this report until March, relying instead on patrols by the U.N. international police (CIVPOL) and indigenous Kosovo Police Service (KPS). In most cases, prior to March, such changes in security measures did not result in a change in the level of safety of, or access to, the religious sites. During the March riots, KFOR, CIVPOL and KPS were involved in crowd control and protecting lives and property. The priority was evacuating persons over saving property, even religious property. Immediately following the March riots, the process of transfer from KFOR to CIVPOL and KPS was halted. In some areas KFOR resumed static checkpoints and increased protective measures around religious sites and KFOR patrols were more visible. However, following the riots, sporadic attacks against ethnic minority property continued, including looting of reconstructed houses in Obilic/Obiliq and other areas and youths throwing stones at a Serbian Orthodox church near Viti/Vitina.

While previously Protestants have reported suffering violence and discrimination, during the period covered by this report, the only discrimination reported was verbal attacks and exclusion from interfaith initiatives by Islamic leadership on the grounds that Protestants do not comprise a "traditional" religion in Kosovo. The absence of attacks on the Protestants and their religious buildings during the March riots was, according to their leadership, a good sign of acceptance by the Kosovo public.

Apart from an incident during the March riots in Prizren when the rioters mistook a Catholic church for a Serbian Orthodox church and nearly attacked it, Kosovo Catholic leaders reported no problems. The Catholic leaders reported that they had good relations with the Muslim community but hardly had any contact with the Orthodox leadership, whom they consider highly politicized. The Muslim community made similar remarks concerning their relationship with the Catholic leadership and lack of relationship with the Orthodox community.

The withdrawal of FRY and Serbian troops from Kosovo in 1999 and establishment of UNMIK resulted in an improved situation for the majority, largely Muslim, ethnic Albanian population, and a cessation of attacks on their mosques and religious sites.

According to the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (AJJDC) representative in Pristina, the Jewish community in Kosovo is very small; about 40 people from 2 families in Prizren have some Jewish roots, but there are no synagogues or Jewish institutions. The AJJDC representative reported no incidents of physical violence or harassment toward Jewish persons during the period covered by this report.

Islamic, Orthodox, and Catholic religious leaders have attempted to encourage tolerance and peace in Kosovo, in both the religious and political spheres.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with UNMIK, the PISG, and religious representatives in Kosovo as part of its overall policy to promote human rights and has sought to promote ethnic and religious tolerance in Kosovo. U.S. officials have also maintained close contacts with religious leaders.

Since 2000, the U.S. Government has provided significant funding to Radio KIM (Radio Caglavica), based at Gracanica Monastery, which broadcasts in both Serbian and Roma. Serbian Orthodox Bishop Artemije's clerical staff runs the station, and it broadcasts news, music, interviews, and cultural programs. Also, during the period covered by this report, the U.S. Government funded the remainder of a survey of Islamic manuscripts in Kosovo to help the local Islamic community preserve its religious heritage.

The U.S. is involved actively in UNMIK, which is aimed at securing peace, facilitating refugee return and reconstruction, laying the foundations for democratic self-government, and fostering respect for human rights regardless of ethnicity or religion.

U.S. KFOR peacekeeping troops have worked to prevent ethnic and religious violence in Kosovo and have guarded religious sites. USKFOR was credited with preventing the situation from further escalation in their sector during the March riots.

The Department of State's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs funds a U.N. international police (CIVPOL) advisor in Pristina and provided \$48 million (39.36 million euros) to support KPS and CIVPOL. KPS and CIVPOL have worked to prevent ethnic and religious violence in Kosovo.

The Department of State's Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration funds a returns officer in Pristina \$11.9 million (9.76 million euros) in returns programs for Muslim and Orthodox Roma, Orthodox Serbs, and Muslim Bosnians.

During the March riots, U.S. Office Pristina was in direct, constant communication with Orthodox religious officials and interacted with local and central government officials as necessary. The Orthodox clergy at Decan monastery credited the U.S. Office with helping to coordinate KFOR's helicopter evacuation of an injured clergy family member. The U.S. Office Pristina was also instrumental in persuading the Decan Mayor to help stop the rioting crowd from advancing on the 14th century monastery, and as a result, the monastery and church were not harmed.

In the wake of the March inter-ethnic violence, U.S. officers met with Islamic, Orthodox, and Catholic religious authorities to discuss ways of supporting reconciliation and interfaith dialogue. Many high-level U.S. Government and military officials visited Kosovo and met with both political and religious leaders to assess the situation and urge reconstruction and progress toward a multiethnic Kosovo. The U.S. Office also urged the Kosovo government to quickly reconstruct Serb homes and allow UNESCO to take the lead on reconstruction of destroyed and damaged religious sites in Kosovo.

The U.S. Office has encouraged dialogue between Kosovo Serbs and Kosovo Albanians on many levels, including hosting an informal dialogue organized by the NGO "Project for Ethnic Relations" on June 23.

Released on September 15, 2004

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