



William J. Murray

The Chairman's

Action Report

Religious
Freedom
Coalition

August 18, 2004

I have just returned to the United States from one of the most physically and emotionally draining missions I have ever been on in my life.



William J. Murray overlooks burned out buildings at Devic Monastery. Ukrainian body guards can be seen in courtyard.

During the mission trip I moderated a panel on anti-Semitism in Brussels, Belgium and examined churches desecrated and destroyed in Kosovo. The extremes of my journey took me from a European Hotel near the seat of government of the European Union, to being escorted by heavily armed special Ukrainian police units to a burned down monastery where we had a face-off with French troops who would not let us enter.

While the 2nd annual Interparliamentary Conference on Human Rights and Religious Freedom was of great importance to this ministry and its supporters, I feel a deep heartfelt obligation to use the limited space I have in this letter to report on the conditions I found in Kosovo and Metohija.

First a brief history: Kosovo was the original Serbia, a home to the Serbian people since at least the 10th Century. The first Christian church was constructed in Kosovo less than 400 years after the death and resurrection of our Lord, Jesus Christ and long before the birth of Mohammed.

The first Muslim invasion of Kosovo and Metohija (which means "Lands of the Church") came in the 1300's by the Ottoman Empire. In 1389 at the battle of Kosovo Polje, the Ottoman Sultan was killed by Serbian forces led by Prince Lazar, thus saving Europe from Islamization. When the news of the Sultan's death reached London the bells of Westminster Cathedral were rung. But in reality the Serbs lost ... the Ottoman Empire, although stopped, had already controlled most of Kosovo. Tens of thousands of Serbs fled to the north to present day Hungary and Croatia.

The Islamic empire of the Ottomans expanded, and finally Constantinople fell in 1453. Although several wars were fought to free the Serb lands from Islamic rule, final control of Serbia and Kosovo was not regained by Christendom until 1912.

Serbian Christians remained a slight majority until WW II, when the Albanian minority collaborated with the Nazi occupiers to kill and "cleanse" the Serbs. In the mid 1990's the mostly Albanian Muslim majority in Kosovo formed the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) to kick the remaining Serbs out of Kosovo. During what could be called a civil war, thousands were killed on both sides. The fighting ended when the United States and NATO entered the war in 1999 on the side of the Muslim Albanians. As a result the main highway through Kosovo's capital is named after President Bill Clinton and huge banners picturing him hang on buildings in downtown Pristina, the administrative capital of UN-ruled Kosovo.



Six story high banner photo of Bill Clinton

During the fighting in the 1990's both churches and mosques were damaged or destroyed, sometimes on a tit for tat basis. The United Nations took over administrative control of Kosovo in June, 1999 and NATO took responsibility for security. As a result the police are controlled by the UN and security forces are controlled by NATO.



St. George's Cathedral in Prizren, Kosovo was defiled and burned in March, 2004

To state it plainly, NATO and the UN have been responsible for the well being of the people of Kosovo, both Muslim Albanians and Christian Serbs since June of 1999. While the UN and NATO have been in control, more than 200,000 Serbs have been forced from their homes and thousands of Serbian civilians killed. Thousands of Christian Serbian homes have been looted and destroyed and 150 churches, monasteries and seminaries have been destroyed. Some of the churches which have been defiled, looted and burned have existed since the 1300's and survived even the 500-year long Ottoman occupation. In March of this year an organized effort was made by Kosovo Albanians through mob violence to force out the last remaining Christian Serbs from Kosovo.

The purpose of our fact finding mission to Kosovo was to determine the cause of the March, 2004 destruction of Orthodox churches and monasteries and to make recommendations to stop future violence of this nature. While the fact finding mission was organized by social conservatives, notable liberals were invited to make sure the panel was unbiased. As a result, Rev. Bob Edgar, General Secretary of the National Council of Churches and a self avowed opponent of the conservative movement, accompanied us. He was just as appalled by the violence as were the rest of us.



UN Principle Deputy Charles H. Brayshaw, Joe Grieboski, Bob Edgar and William J. Murray

When we met with Charles H. Brayshaw, the Principle Deputy for UN General Secretary Kofi Annan in Kosovo he was frank in admitting the failures of the administration of the area. He was particularly concerned about "...the failure to provide a sense of security for minorities."



Ukrainian special police under UN command assigned to protect our

He did not have to give us illustrations to prove the point that minorities needed protection in Kosovo. A heavily armed, specially trained unit of Ukrainian police was assigned to our delegation. Each of our 18 guards wore class four body armor and carried high caliber automatic weapons.

One of the individuals accompanying the delegation was an Albanian photographer whose husband was Serbian. This individual confided to us that her husband could not leave their home unless accompanied by her, for fear of attack. It is virtually impossible for a Serbian Christian to obtain emergency services in Kosovo. Serbs die mysteriously when they are taken to any of the Albanian run hospitals. Christians have no freedom of movement and therefore no freedom to practice their faith.

In advance of the mission to Kosovo I learned that rural clinics in areas where Serbs live have few medical supplies. To be of some help, I took three "mission medical kits" with enough drugs to care for up to 500 people for three to six months in each kit.



Serbian doctor in Kosovo accepts mission medical kits from William Murray

Let me make it clear that the medical kits delivered were purchased and transported by the Religious Freedom Coalition and not by the full delegation. The delegation was investigative only.

The medical supplies which included very expensive antibiotics, were delivered to a clinic in the village of Osojanje in Kosovo. Although the clinic had an ambulance, the doctor informed me that he could not send any patients to Albanian controlled hospitals, particularly pregnant women, because male Serbian children do not survive birth there.

On the other hand he showed me records of a number of Albanian Muslim children who had been treated at his clinic in emergencies. When he opened the boxes and saw the supplies we delivered he said that it "...was a gift from God." Across the street from the clinic, refugees from the March attacks live in tents with no hope of returning to their destroyed homes.

One member of our delegation, Rev. Michael Faulkner, pastor of the Central Baptist Church in Manhattan, New York was so touched that he has decided to lead his church to rebuild one of the churches destroyed in the March pogrom.

I am preparing a complete white paper on the trip which includes all details of the fact finding mission including my conversations with the President of Serbia. Because of its size I cannot send it out free of charge, but will send a copy to anyone contributing to our projects in Kosovo.

A final word ... We did not raise all the funds needed for our participation in the Brussels Conference and the mission to Kosovo. If you can, please help the Religious Freedom Coalition financially this month.

William J. Murray, Chairman