

**KOSOVO FACT FINDING MISSION – AUGUST, 2004**  
A White Paper of the Religious Freedom Coalition



**William J. Murray at defiled and destroyed Devi Monastery in Kosovo**

and cried some actually sobbing when the damage at the Devi Monastery was examined.

French KFOR were guarding the Devi Monastery the day it was destroyed on March 18, 2004. The same French unit was present when we came to view the site. For two hours the French “examined” the passports and paperwork of our team of nine and about six journalists who accompanied us. The troops at the entrance to the monastery told us they were not forewarned of our arrival and would not let us proceed without the permission of a commander. These are the French forces that forcibly removed the nuns from the Monastery on March 18<sup>th</sup> and then held them back as a mob defiled the church and set it on fire.



**Desecrated Graves at Devi**



**Burned Alter at Devi Monastery**

The entire team was skeptical of the French reasons for blocking our entry into the Monastery. We arrived at the site as a caravan that included our bus and four United Nations vehicles containing a squad of 18 uniformed Ukrainian policeman assigned to protect us. It was obvious to even the untrained eye that this was a visit authorized by the United Nations. Our guards were heavily armed, wore United Nations blue berets with the UN logo clearly visible on their vehicles and uniforms. As a group we came to the conclusion that the French just did not want us to see the horrible damage to the monastery they had allowed. The French knew we were on a schedule for the day and believed that eventually we would just give up and go to our next stop. We didn't, and they were eventually forced to allow us in.

The damage to the Devi Monastery clearly had both ethnic and religious connotations. The entire complex was first looted, with even the meager belongings of the nuns being stolen. Church artifacts considered of monetary value were stolen, and then the icons, some of them very ancient, were smashed. The chapel alter was defiled and burned as were the contents of all the buildings. The buildings themselves burnt to their shells and the roofing collapsed. No effort was made to extinguish the flames ... the French simply watched the destruction, either not understanding the historic value of the building to humanity or simply having no interest in preservation of the world's culture.

The indignities and defilement did not stop with the monastery buildings--the crosses on the graves in the cemetery were smashed as well. The mob had also pried open the coffin of Saint Joanikije to destroy his remains not knowing that they had been moved by the Orthodox Church to a safer location during an early conflict. The monastery complex had been rebuilt after suffering destruction by the Kosovo Liberation Army in 1999. The monastery has been in existence since the 15<sup>th</sup> Century and continually occupied by the Orthodox Church except during the occupation of that part of Serbia in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

Our team traveled from the Devic to the Monastery of Visoki Decani which had been saved by Italian troops during the anti-Christian riots this year on March 17, 18 and 19. Unlike the French, the Italians stood their ground against an angry mob that outnumbered them by perhaps 500 to one. We had no problem entering the compound. The Italians, seeing that we were a religious group accompanied by UN police, expedited our entry into the compound. We were stopped at the front gate for less than a minute.

This monastery is the resting place of Saint King Stephen. Our Ukrainian guards removed their weapons to accompany us inside the chapel and they prayed next to the coffin of the Saint. Father Sava Janic was so touched that he opened the coffin of the Saint to be viewed by us and our guards. Many of the Ukrainian guards crossed themselves and kneeled down and kissed the forehead of the Saint who died in 1331 after numerous miracles were accredited to him.



**Cathedral of St. George was desecrated and destroyed by mobs in March, 2004**

We were fortunate to have the pleasant experience of visiting the Monastery and the church it surrounds because we soon found ourselves in the midst of destruction and hatred in the nearby city of Prizren. Several churches and a seminary were destroyed at Prizren as were the homes of dozens of Serbian Christian families. A theological seminary built in 1872 was first looted and then burned to the ground. A few blocks away the large Cathedral of St. George was looted and then burned as was the official residence of the Bishop of the church. Several thousand books in the residence (The Edifice of Episcopate) were lost to the fire. The building complex was looted and burned despite the fact that it had been used as the headquarters for German KFOR troops in the town of Prizren. The Germans simply withdrew in the face of the angry mob.

Several smaller churches including the Church of Saint Nicholas which was built in 1331-1332, were totally destroyed. Countless houses, some of which had been built specifically for Serbs returning to Kosovo, were also looted and burned. These scenes were repeated virtually throughout Kosovo during the March, 2004 riots. In all some 35 Orthodox Christian churches and monasteries were damaged or totally destroyed in a few days' time.

Just outside of Prizren proper is the Monastery at the Church of the Holy Archangels built between 1343 and 1352. The actual church itself was torn down by the Ottoman invaders in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. In 1615 the cut stone from the church was used to build the Sinan-pasha's mosque in downtown Prizren. A monastery was built here in the 1960's to study



**Monastery of the Holy Archangels near Prizren was totally destroyed.**

the site of the church. All monastery buildings at the site were first looted and then burned by the mobs as German KFOR troops videotaped the destruction.

Our fact finding team faced a difficult decision in determining if the violence was purely ethnic, purely religious or a combination of both. While Serbian Orthodox churches were looted and burned, Albanian Catholic churches were not touched, but this did not eliminate a religious element.

Although the vast number of Albanians in Kosovo claims to be Muslim, the religion has marginal impact on their daily lives, unlike the fanatical Wahhabi brand of Islam practiced in Saudi Arabia. In urban areas women walk down the street in clothing that would be considered provocative even in France. Men and women touch and embrace in public. The hundreds of new mosques built with Arab money since NATO and the UN took over the Serbian province in June of 1999 for the most part sit unused. The majority of Albanians are secular and pay only marginal attention to religion. However, there is a growing fanatical minority funded by radical Islamic interests in Saudi Arabia and other Arab states that lean strongly toward violent Jihad.

Tens of thousands participated in the riots and destruction of the churches and the homes of Orthodox Christians. About 150 of those participating in the riots have had charges filed against them by the Provisional Kosovo authority and some of those have been arrested. While religion is not part of the arrest record, an official I talked to confirmed that most of the more serious charges were against individuals who considered themselves to be fundamentalist Muslims. Even those charged with murder, however, have been released on minimal bonds.

It is impossible to measure intent by viewing defiled and burnt churches and for that reason the team conducted extensive interviews. This document contains my impressions of those interviews and do not necessarily reflect those of the other members of the fact finding team.

Prior to viewing the destroyed churches the fact finding mission team met with Bishop Artemije, the Serbian Orthodox patriarch of Kosovo-Metohija who told us he believed the destruction was planned and orchestrated as a means of continuing the process of purging Serbian families who had lived in the region for more than 1,000 years. He cited the fact that during the riots of March 17-18, chartered buses were used to take vandals to the more remote sites such as Devic to wreck their destruction.

Albanian officials we interviewed denied that the events of March were planned. Dragon Kojadinovic the Minister of Culture, who is a Muslim, told us the events were spontaneous and that officials of the Kosovo Provisional government had condemned the attacks and had pledged funds to help in the rebuilding.

Jahja Liuka, a spokesman for the Alliance for the Future of Kosovo (AK) made the same claims. (The party is headed by a former leader of the Muslim KLA) The AK is part of the governing coalition of Kosovo. The spokesman stated the goal of the AK was "... to establish a democratic state and become a part of Europe." He stated that the Kosovo Provisional Authority was powerless to stop the events of March because "... international agencies control security," clearly intimating that a Muslim controlled government would do a better job at protecting Christian churches than the existing International peace keeping presence.



S. Selimi, former leader of the terrorist KLA with members of the fact finding mission in August, 2004

A meeting was also held with S. Selimi, the former head of the KLA who is now the general in charge of the Kosovo Protection Force (KPC). The KPC was set up by the United Nations and NATO to pay the 5,000 KLA fighters who had battled the government of Serbia for more than a decade. Even this stony eyed former terrorist commander understood the damage done by the March riots. He said, “We have lost in the international community,” and stated that the KPC had offered to guard the sites after the riots. I left this meeting with the feeling that their delight about the destruction of Serbian sites had turned into genuine concern

as the realization set in that the EU would not accept a nation as a member who would allow such atrocities to happen. Should Kosovo become independent, this man will lead its armed forces. (Note: The KLA was on the US list of known terrorist organizations until 1999. The organization was removed from the list by President Bill Clinton so that US armed forces and NATO could assist them in defeating the Yugoslavian Army that year. After NATO entered Kosovo in June, 1999 about 115 churches and monasteries were destroyed and more than 200,000 Serbs were forced out of the Kosovo province. In March an additional 35 churches were destroyed, bringing the total to 150 churches destroyed under NATO protection.)

We also met with Naim Ternava, the President of the Islamic community founded in 1948. The Mufti claims to represent all Imams and 530 mosques in Kosovo. He made the following statements to us:

1. “There has always been harmony between the three religions in Kosovo”
2. “We have good relations with the Catholic and Orthodox churches”
3. “We don’t have the problems that lead to religious conflicts.”
4. “We were the first to condemn the acts of March 17-18”
5. “We have no Imams from abroad; they are all from Kosovo. All funds to build mosques come from Kosovo. There is no money from Arab interests.”

Not many questions were put to the Mufti because of the obvious falsehoods of his opening statement. There has been religious strife in Kosovo since the first invasion of Muslim armies in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. The Muslims have taken the area by force and then been forcibly removed from it more than once. At the Battle of Kosovo Fields in 1389, the Ottoman Army was stopped by Orthodox Serb forces from entering Europe. The battle was so key to saving Christian Europe that when the news of the results of the battle reached England the bells of Westminster Cathedral were rung in celebration. We had already received briefings from American and UN officials who told us that more than 300 new mosques had been built in the Saudi style principally with Saudi Wahhabi money and that this was a genuine security concern. When pushed, the Mufti insisted that only 65 mosques had been built and all with funds were obtained solely from within Kosovo. He also refused to admit that the new Madres in Prestina were funding by Arab sources. As a result Mufti Naim Ternava’s comments, in my opinion, were not factual enough to use in determining the underlying causes of the anti-Serbian Orthodox riots in March.

Having heard from Orthodox Serbian and Muslim Albanian sources, we turned to more neutral individuals including a newspaper editor, UN officials and American State Department sources.



**Joe Grieboski, William J Murray,  
Rev. Bob Edgar and ombudsman  
Marek Antonio Nowicki**

He stated that it would be impossible for ethnic Serbs to move back into urban areas, and they would have to remain in small isolated villages until there is some positive political change. He intimated, but did not state that the chance of Kosovo independence had been set back by the violence.

His office had previously reported that hundreds of Muslim Ashkali also had homes destroyed during the March riots. The Ashkali have been loyal to the previous Serbian central government and were seen as traitors by the other Muslims. Their homes had been destroyed in 1999 and they had just recently moved back. After the second destruction of their villages and homes they are being resettled in Serbia. (Note ... I had told Mufti Ternava this and he said it was a lie and that Muslims were being “forced to leave Serbia daily.”)



**Charles H. Bradshaw, Joe  
Grieboski, Rev. Bob Edgar  
and William J. Murray**

Marek Antonio Nowicki is the official ombudsman for the United Nations in Kosovo. Individuals suffering from abuses are supposed to take their case to him. He is completely neutral and forthcoming. His office maintains an internet site at [www.onbudspersonkosovo.org](http://www.onbudspersonkosovo.org). In March of 2004 the United Nations sent out a general letter stating that security had improved and the presence of KFOR forces was no longer required. He immediately responded to the letter stating that this was not the case and that security for months later 35 churches and thousands of homes were burned in a “organized” effort. While security has improved since March

Charles H. Brayshaw is Principle Deputy for UN General Secretary Koki Annan in Kosovo. In other words he runs the place. He is to Kosovo what George Brenner was to Iraq before authority was handed back to the Iraqis. Mr. Brayshaw’s view is the official view; he represents the official policy of the United Nations.

He stated that while Kosovo had “...moved substantially toward the rule of law,” that the March events have “broader implications” that are a “setback that leads to new directions.” Mr. Brayshaw’s statement, “Albanian leadership has finally realized these events and their national reputation and their future.”

The United States and the United Nations has set a policy of “standards before status” in Kosovo. UN Resolution 1244 states that in 2005 a review of the status of Kosovo and the possibility of independence will be considered. US and UN officials had believed Kosovo was “ready” for independence, but the March riots proved otherwise. Mr. Brayshaw stated, “We have named the specific things that must be done before status is determined by the United Nations. Finally the Albanians are focusing on the specifics.”

Contrary to the statements of the Albanian leaders we met, Mr. Brayshaw stated that they did not condemn or try to stop the rioters until “After we asked them to.”

(NOTE: This statement also contradicted those made to us by US Interest Office personnel who have nothing but praise for Albanian officials.)

Mr. Brayshaw indicated that while there had been some great success in the five year UN administration of Kosovo there were three major failures.

1. Failure to instill a confidence of security in minorities, particularly Serbs.
2. Failure to repatriate Serbs (IDPs) to Kosovo. We have about 10,000 back and that is being limited by fear and economic prospects.
3. Failure to create a functioning market economy.

Mr. Brayshaw introduced Peggy Hicks who runs the UN department for returnees to discuss the issue of IDP's further. She stated, "We have done a good job with facilities for return, but not good conditions ... Ethnic crime is down because there is a lack of contact ... The environment for minority return must be on local officials ... Emphasis must be on the rule of law." She stated that the number of violent acts in March toward Orthodox Christian Serbs had greatly reduced the number willing to return to Kosovo.

The presentation and direct answers to fact finding team questions gave me the distinct impression that the US and UN had previously thought the Albanians in charge of Kosovo were ready for the status of independent nationhood and that the events of March were clearly making all concerned perhaps think differently. The goal of building a multi-ethnic European model in Kosovo has clearly not been established by the United Nations, nor by NATO forces.

We also met with three Serbian members of the Kosovo Provisional Government. In setting up the Provisional Authority the United Nations and NATO had demanded a "set aside" in the make up of the parliament. Ten seats are reserved for Serbs regardless of the outcome of the election.

Our conversations with the three Serbian members of Parliament were less striking than their arrival at our hotel. They arrived in three different United Nations vehicles with a total of 12 heavily armed guards. No member of the US Congress, not even the Speaker of the House who is third in line to succeed the President, is guarded to this extent. When asked, the Serbian members of the Kosovo parliament informed us that they had armed escorts to Parliament sessions as well, while no security was provided for any Albanian PMs because none was needed. They also informed us that in the time they had been in the Kosovo parliament not a single bill they had proposed had even reached the point of a committee hearing. All three made it clear that Serbian Orthodox Christians did not have the opportunity to have meaningful participation in government.

I have reserved my comments on our contacts with the US government representatives in Kosovo for last because those comments were out of synch with everything we had learned elsewhere. The positions and observations of American officials on the ground are so out of touch with the reality of the situation in Kosovo that they could almost be considered bizarre. Indeed, the comments of the Islamic Mufti made more sense than some of the comments we received from US government representatives. It was clear from their general attitude that they were very uncomfortable with our presence.

Many of the conversations with Albanian, Serbian and UN officials were recorded in whole or in part with their permission. Still photos and videos were taken at all meetings. However, when we met with American officials all recording devices, cameras and cell phones were confiscated from our very distinguished group. At a meeting that was held in the press room of the American Interest Section in Pristina we were not allowed to have cameras despite the fact

that the room was constructed for that very purpose. As a result, any comment I or other members of the mission team make with regard to the American position can be refuted.

The official position of our government representative is Kosovo with regard to the Serbian Orthodox minority is as follows:

1. Serbians should learn to speak Albanian so they can be integrated into the society. They are not a different color, so just learning the language should stop persecution.
2. If they learn Albanian they will get better jobs.
3. Kosovoans are not religious and have no religious agenda
4. There is a dangerous Jihadist element in Kosovo (Contradicts item 3)

I was personally so astonished by the idea that Serbs who had lived in an area for perhaps a hundred generations or more should be forced to learn a new language to “fit in” that I pressed the point noting that in the United States emergency services must, by executive order, be provided in multiple languages.

The response by one of the American officials: “If I lived in San Antonio I would at least learn how to order a taco in Spanish.” I found the comment racist and offensive but it summed up the position of our State Department officials in Kosovo. It became apparent that since the UN and NATO has failed establish a “multi-ethnic” environment in Kosovo that our government simply wants to bail out and the easiest way to do that is to blame the Serbs for not “integrating” into the new Albanian society.

NOTE: When I quoted the American staff comments on integration into society at the Brayshaw meeting those present were somewhat surprised and I was given an official UN response that this position was not acceptable to the United Nations.

#### CONCLUSIONS:

The violence of March 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup>, principally against Serbian Orthodox Christians, was both ethnic and religious in nature. While many in the mobs were secular and even atheistic there was a degree of Jihadist hatred against all Christianity. Churches were not just burned and looted, but Christian symbols were defiled in a manner consistent with religious hatred. The destruction of Christian libraries, the burning of the body of an Orthodox saint and the desecration of cemeteries left no doubt of a religious element. United Nations officials we spoke with and neutral observers agree with this assessment. Only American officials and the Mufti of the Islamic Community contest the religious aspect of the riots.

The United Nations and NATO have failed to provide the atmosphere for a multi-ethnic society in Kosovo because they emphasized security over education. Textbooks and schools in Kosovo teach children ethnic hatred by refusing to even acknowledge a presence in Kosovo of Serbians or Christianity. Albanian newspapers and other media are for the most part not factual and assist in spreading disinformation and hatred toward Serbian Orthodox believers. The Albanians in control of government have had a myopic view, believing the United States would always be on their side because of the 1999 war and they would be granted EU and NATO membership regardless of their treatment of the Serbs. Only in the aftermath of March did Albanian officials begin to realize that EU membership would be a transparent border and with a transparent border minorities would have to be protected.

Not only is there a division between Orthodox Christians and Albanian Muslims, but between Europeans ostensibly there to create a multi-ethnic society. American, Italian and Spanish peacekeepers protect the Christian Minority while French and German troops lean toward the Muslim majority and allow atrocities. Police from Slavic nations such as the Ukrainians who provided us with protection have little power to protect their Christian brothers while having empathy for them. Put bluntly, the protectors are as divided and often as hostile toward each other as those they came to protect.

The society in the Kosovo province of Serbia was more diverse and had a richer ethnic mix prior to the intervention of the United States and NATO in 1999. The willingness of Serbia to play a peaceful role is being ignored by both NATO and the United Nations in favor of established a Muslim state in Europe. Realizing their intervention was probably a mistake the Europeans and the Americans simply want out of the costly mess they created. Even though no multi-ethnic society has been built; even though no security is at hand for minorities; and even though Kosovo does not qualify as a stable entity it is obvious that NATO and the United Nations intends to steer it toward independent statehood. The result will be continued ethnic cleansing in Kosovo and probably the emergence of a state that sponsors terrorism in Europe.

Author: William J. Murray, Chairman – Religious Freedom Coalition

Authorized and distributed by:

Religious Freedom Coalition  
PO Box 77511  
Washington, DC 20013  
(202) 543-0300  
[www.rfcnet.org](http://www.rfcnet.org)