

## **Kosovo: Murders Reignite Serb Fears**

Brutal killing of two young men stirs fresh complaints about alleged inactivity of international police.

Kosovo Serbs are demanding better security from international troops after the murder of two young Serbs at the weekend in an isolated enclave in the territory.

Some local representatives have said that if they do not receive firm guarantees about their security, they will go ahead with plans to draw up their own self-defence guards.

Ivan Dejanovic, 24, and Aleksandar Stankovic, 28, were shot dead on August 29 on the road from Strpce to Urosevac/Ferizaj, 80 kilometres southeast of Pristina.

The men were killed when their assailants' vehicle overtook their car on the road into the enclave and opened fire.

The victims were easily identifiable as Serbs as their car had old Yugoslav number plates. Two other Serbs were wounded in the shooting.

Outraged Serbs organised protests in Strpce and in the Serb enclaves of north Mitrovica and Gračanica, where some speakers blamed international peacekeepers for the bloodshed.

International troops "are not putting enough efforts into providing security for Serbs in Kosovo", said Stanko Jakovljevic, mayor of Strpce. "We will no longer tolerate such irresponsible behaviour."

KFOR and the UN police, known as UNMIK Police, have been responsible for security in Kosovo since 1999, when the Serb authorities were forced to withdraw after NATO's bombing campaign.

They now work in tandem with a locally established police force, the Kosovo Police Services, KPS.

The 90 per cent of the territory's population who are Albanian want independence. In the meantime, however, Kosovo remains legally part of Serbia.

Kai Eide, the UN envoy on Kosovo, is due to present a report next month on whether Kosovo Albanians have done enough to guarantee the rights of the Serb minority.

The report is bound to have an impact on the outcome of the final status talks on Kosovo's future that are due to begin this year.

Ljubomir Milekovic, 42, a shopkeeper in Strpce, said the latest murders had shaken morale in the isolated community.

“The atmosphere is tense and we are all worried for the security of our families,” he said.

“If KFOR and local police cannot guarantee our security we will have to organise self-defence guards to protect ourselves.”

Similar views were aired at the crisis meeting attended by the representatives of all the Serb villages in Strpce municipality earlier this week.

Many representatives argued that they should seriously consider organising their own local police if KFOR, UNMIK Police and the KPS did not do a better job.

Neeraj Singh, the UNMIK spokesperson, said he believed such additional guards were not needed, as his police were working already towards meeting Serb demands.

“Local people in Strpce have asked for more officers and we will get them more to patrol the area,” he said.

Singh said there had already been a big improvement in the level of services offered.

Recent successful initiatives included crime prevention councils in all municipalities and community-based police stations in 25 minority villages all over Kosovo, he said.

The aim was “to ensure that local people are fully engaged in decisions about the security of their area”, added Singh.

But many Serbs remain convinced that the UNMIK Police have done little to find the perpetrators of a series of ethnically motivated crimes against Serbs, which they say are intended to drive Kosovo’s remaining Serbs from their homes.

Milan Ivanovic, leader of Serb National Council, SNC, based in north Mitrovica, says most Serbs lost faith in the UNMIK Police after they failed to resolve previous Serb murder cases.

“When Serb youths were killed in Gorazdevac they told us they would move heaven and earth to find the murderers,” he said. “But more than two years on, no one has been caught.”

Ivanovic was referring to the brutal slaying of two Serb youths, shot dead on August 13, 2003 while swimming with friends in a river in Gorazdevac, a village near Peja/Pec.

Another high-profile murder of three Serb members of the Stolic family in Obiliq on June 4 that year has also not been resolved.

Singh admits these failings but says a more balanced account should include some police successes.

“We have not resolved the Gorazdevac and Obilic murders but we have resolved the Gracanica killing of a Serb youth and we have someone on trial for the Nis bus bombing,” he said.

Singh was referring firstly to the shooting dead of a Serb teenager in Gracanica, near Pristina, last June. Two Albanians have since been charged over that crime.

Florim Ejupi, an Albanian, has been charged over the bomb attack on a bus that killed seven Serbs and injured 43.

Singh maintained that the ethnically motivated crime rate was falling in Kosovo, as no new crimes had been reported since last June.

“This is indeed a tragic incident but it is nevertheless an isolated incident which doesn’t establish a trend,” he said, in reference to the events in Strpce. “We have seen a clear decrease, rather than an increase, in ethnically motivated crime in Kosovo.”

The debate about trends in the crime rate makes little difference to most local Serbs in the enclave.

Milos Radovic, 57, who works in the ambulance service in Strpce and who used to live in the nearby town of Urosevac/Ferizaj before the conflict, said he was one of many just waiting to leave.

“Life is hard here and this murder only reinforces my reasons for not wanting to stay in Kosovo,” he said.

“I am waiting for my pension and I will then leave for Serbia.”

Sasa Milosavljevic, 31, a bank worker in Strpce, disagreed. “I don’t feel safe after what has happened but I will stay because my life is here,” he said. “Everything that I have and love is here.”

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