

## **Serbs' Pristina Misery**

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The remnants of Pristina's Serb population huddle together in a building guarded round-the-clock by KFOR troops.

"Can this be called a life? " sighs Sanja Nikolic, as six KFOR solidiers, weapons at the ready, escort two of her children to a bus parked outside her home.

The troops stop the traffic and the bus, sandwiched between armored vehicles, sets off for a Serb school in Laplje Selo, 10 km from Pristina.

Sanja and her family live in a building in the Pristina suburb of Ulpiajana, housing the remnants of the city's Serb population.

The one hundred or so families, protected round-the-clock by KFOR soldiers, moved to the shelter after being forced out of their homes in other parts Pristina.

When international troops entered Kosovo last year, most of the region's 200,000 Serbs fled to Serbia, fearful of revenge attacks. Those who remained behind retreated to enclaves, the largest being northern Mitrovica.

Sanja , though, decided to stay in Pristina. The 31-year-old mother of three has now been living in the city's solitary Serb enclave since December.

Before she moved there, she lived in a heavily guarded apartment in the suburb of Dardanija. "Seven KFOR soldiers were in my flat day and night," she says. "I couldn't stand it any more. But it was difficult for them to protect me, so they decided to move me here."

It's cold in her one-bedroom apartment. She has a floor heater, but often no power (power cuts occur every three hours or so in Pristina). The water supply is sporadic, and Sanja keeps water stored in plastic bottles on the kitchen floor.

"When the power is back on I just don't know what to do first. I have to cook lunch, do laundry, wash or iron the nappies," she says. "I can't afford to buy Pampers nappies and I've been trying to use the cotton nappies less because I don't know when or how I'll be able to wash them."

Sanja's three month-old daughter Tamara was born in the Russian hospital in Kosovo Polje. Everything she needs - bottles, nappies, Kleenexes - is provided by KFOR soldiers.

Tamara will never meet her father. Sanja's husband was a locksmith. He was killed after last year's NATO bombardment, despite never working for the Serbian security services or ever being politically active.

Sanja was five months pregnant. She buried her husband, then left for Belgrade with five-year-old Milorad and eight-year-old Marko.

"Albanians were disturbing us all the time. They were kicking our door, phoning and threatening to kill me. Four Albanians tried to pull me into a car on the street. I decided to go to Belgrade. I thought - our people are there, they will help me."

Arriving in Belgrade's Dragise Misovic hospital, though, she was greeted with the words, "You're the last thing we need right now. We've got enough refugees from Croatia and Bosnia. Go back to where you came from."

Sanja and her children spent two months in Belgrade, knocking on doors and asking humanitarian institutions for help. Everywhere she went she got the same answer, "It is not our area of responsibility."

They were staying with relatives in a tiny flat, sleeping on the floor. Life was difficult, and Sanja decided to rejoin her parents in Pristina, only to face more problems.

Her parents had been subjected to verbal and physical intimidation. And after her father was beaten up, breaking his nose and collarbone, the family decided to move to the Montenegrin town of Berane.

Sanja stayed in Pristina, alone but for her three children. When she's not cooking or washing for the children, she stands by the window in her block and watches the street, like every other resident. She hasn't left the building since she arrived.

The view is nothing special: the building opposite, parked cars, garbage and KFOR soldiers. There's not much else to do.

Other residents go shopping or visit the doctor, always escorted by armed soldiers. They all survive on humanitarian aid.

"What hurts me most is how they treated me in Belgrade," Sanja says now. "I didn't get any help from Kosovo Serb political representatives. And here, nobody comes over to see how we're doing."

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