

KOSOVO: Additional Attacks against the Orthodox Sites

Branko Bjelajac, Center 9 (www.centar9.org), Belgrade, 24 January 2013

Serbian Orthodox Christians continue to struggle with a wave of attacks and vandalism against their graveyards and churches in Kosovo, connected with anger of the Albanian population related to a police removing of a monument to 27 Albanians who died in clashes with the police in 2000. The removal occurred in Presevo in southern Serbia on the 20th of January.

During the evening of 21 January, unknown perpetrators demolished eight tombstones in the Serbian Orthodox graveyard in **Vitina**, the city where a local monument to the victims of the Second World War was demolished the same day. That monument bore names of both the Albanians and Serbs who died in the fights more than 65 years ago. Because of passivity, several police officers were suspended in Vitina, by a decree from the headquarters in Pristina.

During the night 21/22 January, five Serbian tombstones were desecrated and demolished in **Pristina**. A local priest reports that the church is being protected by a police patrol all the time.

Rasko-Prizren Diocese of the Serbian Orthodox Church reported that on the 22 January unknown perpetrators broke into and desecrated a small church of Holy Trinity in the village of **Babljak**, near Urosevac.

During the night of 22/23 January unknown perpetrators wrote insulting graffiti on the southern wall of the Serbian Orthodox Church of St. Czar Uros, in the center of **Urosevac**, in Kosovo. They also wrote an acronym OBPBM that stands for the former Albanian fighting unit in the Southern Serbia "Liberation Army of Presevo, Bujanovac and Medvedja".

Local priest, Fr. Zivojin Kojic, stated that he "does not know how this occurred since the police is guarding the church". A patrol of the Kosovo police is located in front of the church for the last several days. In spite of their protection this incident occurred, which is quite disturbing for the small Serbian population in Urosevac.

Because of the continuation of the attacks, atmosphere of uncertainty prevails. The Serbian population of Vitina and Klokot even fear, some media reported, that the 'Albanians will now come and plow our graveyards... and as they are attacking the dead, what can be expected for the living' they ask.

Centar 9 reminds that in 2011 the vandals also desecrated a Jewish graveyard, and AP wrote about it: <http://news.yahoo.com/jewish-cemetery-kosovo-capital-desecrated-153240427.html> .

At that occasion, the US embassy strongly condemned the perpetrators, and after that signed an agreement with the Pristina government on the protection of objects related to Holocaust. Under the attacks, all the remaining Jews moved out from Kosovo either to Serbia or Israel.