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KOSOVO: ORTHODOX DIOCESE TO SEEK FINANCIAL DAMAGES FOR DESTRUCTION OF CHURCHES

by Branko Bjelajac, Keston News Service

Increasingly frustrated by the international community's failure to protect Serbian Orthodox churches in Kosovo, the Orthodox diocese of Raska and Prizren and the Serbian National Council (SNC), a body with close ties to the diocese, have decided to seek monetary compensation from some of the international bodies involved in the administration of the province as well as some Western governments. 'KFOR and UNMIK, who have not resolved ONE case, not ONE single case, to date of the destruction of churches are responsible for carrying out, at least, monetary reparations to the Church,' the SNC and the diocese declared in a statement.

The two bodies, which took the decision in the wake of the August destruction of Ss. Peter and Paul Church in Velika Reka (see separate KNS article), are claiming compensation for the renovation of destroyed churches' from the United Nations and the European Union, as well as a number of Western governments. '[St Elijah's] was not only a spiritual but a little Serbian cultural centre as well,' diocesan architect Professor LJUBISA FOLIC told Keston on 21 August in Belgrade. "I am unable to estimate the sum of money that has been lost so far, but we are talking about the history of one whole nation. We will follow international resolutions, conventions and decisions in similar cases; the economical patterns are being established.'

On 15 August the Serbian Orthodox Church instructed its office in Washington, D.C. to send an appeal to the US Commission on International Religious Freedom requesting protection for its churches and shrines in Kosovo. "Today, under the internationally brokered "peace", the letter read," we are witnessing systematic and organised terror waged against the Serbian people and their Orthodox Christian faith.' After listing numerous attacks, the letter asks " Are these not overt violations of religious freedom in Kosovo?'

LAWRENCE GOODRICH, communications director of the Commission, confirmed to Keston by telephone from Washington on 8 September that the letter from the Serbian Orthodox Church in the US and Canada had been received. He declared that the Commission considered the reports in the letter and other reports of church destructions in Kosovo "disturbing' and confirmed that the Commission would be responding soon to the letter and inviting Church representatives to meet the Commission. (END)