

## **KOSOVO: One Church Blown Up, Attack Fails at Second**

by Branko Bjelajac, Keston News Service, 13 February 2001

Officials of the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) and the international peacekeeping force KFOR have condemned a series of attacks on Serbian houses and churches in Kosovo in early February, dubbing them 'criminal acts'. A church in south-eastern Kosovo was destroyed and attempts to blow up another one nearby were thwarted by KFOR troops. 'An investigation is in progress and further information will be provided at a later time,' a KFOR statement declared.

No-one was injured in the explosion, which razed the church in the village of Gornji Livoc in Kosovsko Pomoravlje around 11 pm on 7 February. The church was only 50 metres from a KFOR checkpoint. 'Initial reports indicate that the blast was caused by an explosive device inside the church,' KFOR spokesman Captain Richard Kusak told a press conference in Pristina the following day. The UNMIK regional administrator for Gnjilane, Pasqualino Verdecchia, visited the site on 8 February and condemned what he called 'a criminal act against cultural heritage'.

UNMIK spokesperson Susan Manuel reported on 9 February that there had been 'an increase in attacks on Serbian houses and churches' in the previous two days. 'Four Serbian houses were destroyed on Thursday morning in Gnjilane, and three houses were blown up in Vitina on Wednesday, one kilometre away from a Serbian church that [had already been] destroyed.' She reported the destruction of the church in Gornji Livoc, adding that 'criminals tried to destroy a church in the village of Gornja Kufca [Kusce]' but Kosovo Protection unit (local civil defence) members prevented them from doing this.

'The church destroyed in Gornji Livoc was a small chapel we used occasionally for burial and liturgical services,' Father Radivoje Zivkovic, a parish priest from Gornji Livoc region, told Keston News Service by telephone on 12 February. 'It was created ten years ago by the villagers. We put some icons inside to make it a proper place of worship. My parishioners came in and told me that had been razed to the ground. Along with the chapel, two houses were destroyed the same night. It is disastrous and we are extremely upset.'

Because of poor communications, Keston was unable to reach representatives of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Vitina to learn more about the attempted destruction of the church in the nearby village of Gornje Kusce. Father Zivkovic told Keston that the Church of Sveta Petka, which is on a hill, was close to other buildings destroyed, but local KFOR units had prevented attackers from planting dynamite in it.

Other incidents reported include a gun attack on the Draganac monastery, reported on 8 February by the Belgrade news agency Tanjug

Following the recent attacks on the Serbian villages of Velika Hoca and Orahovac and the destruction of the church in Gornji Livoc, the Yugoslav Federal Committee for Kosovo and Metohija demanded 'energetic action' by KFOR and UNMIK. 'It depends on the Albanian leaders, UNMIK and KFOR whether Serbs will continue to be the victims of Albanian extremists,' Momcilo Trajkovic, the chairman of the committee, told the Belgrade daily Blic on 9 February.

In the past 18 months about a hundred Serbian Orthodox churches, monasteries, monuments and graveyards have been seriously damaged or destroyed in Kosovo. No-one has yet been charged, arrested or tried for any of these attacks. Since last September the number of attacks has declined sharply. In December St Nicholas' church in Pristina was slightly damaged in a hand grenade attack (see KNS 5 January 2001), but no further attacks on churches had been reported until this latest series of incidents.  
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