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PROMOTION AND PROTECTION OF ALL HUMAN RIGHTS, CIVIL, POLITICAL ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS, INCLUDING THE RIGHT TO DEVELOPMENT

**Written statement^{*} submitted by the Society of Threatened Peoples, a non-
governmental organization in special consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[30 August 2007]

^{*} This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

Kosovo

Minority members in Kosovo need help

With their intervention in 1999, NATO troops achieved that 1.5 million Albanians – displaced persons and refugees – could return to their homes. However, under the eyes of NATO radical, chauvinistic parts of the Albanian public turned against the indigenous minorities of the Sinti and Roma, the Ashkali, and the so-called Kosovo-Egyptians. 75 town districts and villages of the three minority groups which had been socially and economically integrated into Albanian society, were completely destroyed, 14,000 out of 19,000 were destroyed.

Threats, maltreatment, torture, murders, kidnappings and sudden disappearances led to a panicked flight of the Roma and their relative groups. In March 2004, terrorist-like Albanian crowds raged once again through the remaining settlements of the Sinti and Roma, Ashkali and Serbs. Of the about 150,000 Romanies and Ashkali who once lived in Kosovo there are not even 15,000 left today. After almost all international relief organizations had left Kosovo, the humanitarian situation of the remaining minority members in Kosovo deteriorated more and more. The stream of refugees did not stop. Up to 95 per cent of the minority members were unemployed although once the majority had worked in the industry and energy sector, or as excavator drivers, merchants and small farmers.

Regular research conducted by Society for Threatened Peoples in Kosovo has shown that the security and humanitarian situation of the minorities of the Romanies, Ashkali, „Egyptians“, Serbs, Turks, Gorani, Bosniaks, Croatians, and Torbesh is extremely worrying. After no agreement could be reached in a one and a half year-long dispute about the Kosovo status between Kosovo-Albanians and Serbs, and after Marti Ahtisaari's plan was rejected by the UN Security Council, the EU, the US and Russia formed a troika in mid-August 2007 in order to open up a new round of negotiations.

And while so far the interests of the Kosovo-Serbs were officially represented by Belgrade and one representative of the „Srpska lista s Kosova i Metohije“, the minorities of the Romanies, Ashkali, „Egyptians“, Gorani, Turks, Pomaks and Bosniaks had almost no chance to adequately represent their interests and rights.

Catastrophic circumstances in refugee camps

Society for Threatened Peoples has observed the human rights situation in Kosovo since 1999 and considers the situation of the minorities of the Romanies, Ashkali and „Egyptians“, who had to live under precarious circumstances in refugee camps in Kosovo for eight years now, to be hopeless. The refugee camps are Leposavic/Leposaviq (215 refugees, 110 of them minors), Cesmin Lug (144 refugees, 77 of them minors), Osterode (382 refugees, 208 of them minors), and Plementina (60 Romanies families).

In the refugee camp Osterode (the former casern of the French KFOR soldiers in North-Mitrovica) there are Roma refugees who had been moved there from the lead-poisoned refugee camps of Kablare and Zitkovac. There they had been exposed to heavy metal concentration (with a high lead-concentration) since February 2006. Not only the health of the adults, but especially that of children and pregnant women is at risk. It has been proven that the French soldiers had left the casern due to the high lead-concentration there. Doctors had advised them not to beget a child within the first nine months after leaving the casern.

The heavily poisoned UN camp Cesmin Lug/Cesminlukë is still in use, too. The number of its residents is even increasing as refugees who come back to Kosovo from Serbia and Montenegro are brought here. Despite several deaths and numerous miscarriages which are caused by the lead-poisoning, UNMIK and WHO did nothing to solve this problem. The only things that have been done were small “cosmetic” changes.

In early June 2007 WHO conducted new blood tests with the children in Osterode. The parents of the children agreed with this checkup only under the condition to receive a copy of the test results. So far WHO has not complied with its promise. Only the family Jahirovic managed to get the test results after repeated enquiries. Sara, the youngest child of the family, is vomiting every day and has epileptic attacks – symptoms of a bad lead-poisoning. Her test results (she had the highest and acutely perilous level of lead-poisoning). This confirmed Society for Threatened Peoples’ worst fears.

The test results show that the lead-concentrations in the blood had gone down only insignificantly after they had been moved from the refugee site to the casern Osterode and that the concentration still is very much over the point at which strong and irreversible signs of poisoning occur. At the end of June 2007, UNMIK stopped all food aid as there would allegedly be no money for this service. Most of the families are now forced to comb through garbage cans in order to find food.

Also in 2006, ethnic cleansing, violent assaults and discrimination were common parts of everyday life in Kosovo. For the minority members, living without danger to life and limb is impossible in most places in Kosovo:

Refusal to allow them access to employment: Minority members were not allowed to return to their employment after NATO troops and co-workers of the UN had arrived in 1999. Even the latter hardly recruited any of the minority members for assistance jobs. Today, eight years later, only five Roma work for UNMIK.

Lack of Housing: After the war, in the 300 Romanies communities more than 14,500 houses were looted and destroyed. Less than 400 of these houses have been rebuilt by today. According to UN speaker György Kakuk the majority of the families who have returned to the Mahala in South-Mitrovica come from Serbia and Montenegro. Only 12 families from the highly polluted camp Osterode and Cesmin Lug have returned – despite the UN claims that the families from those two camps would have had to be the first to be evacuated due to the high risks of lead-poisoning.

Restrictions of freedom of movement: The leader of Society for Threatened Peoples' Kosovo team often witnessed that members of the Roma minority were prevented from freely moving in the country. In his car he transferred them from their villages in southern and central Kosovo to the hospitals in Serbia and North Mitrovica. If one of his darkskinned Roma colleagues drove the car, they were stopped by the Kosovo Police Force. They had to wait in the sun at the roadside until the officers decided about what to do.

Derecognition of property rights

As long as the Roma do not have official documents, UNMIK-administration and the PISG institutions in Kosovo refuse to recognize property rights of the Roma in South Mitrovica, even though the overwhelming majority of the families have been living on this ground for 200 years.

Living in constant fear because of gestures of vengeance by Albanians

Society for Threatened Peoples is regularly notified about everyday vengeance of Albanians against communities of Roma, Ashkali but also Egyptians, Gorani, Torbesh, Bosniaks, Turks and Jews. Members of these minorities are pressured into leaving Kosovo.

Discrimination in daily live- even in Prizren

Prizren is thought to be the most liberal city for minorities in Kosovo. But even here Albanian merchants only sell to minority members if they speak Albanian.

Domestic violence: Society for Threatened Peoples regularly receives news about the fact that Roma women are beaten up by their husbands, brothers or cousins. Other international organisations confirm these shocking events. If these crimes are reported to the police – which is rarely the case- the officers in charge reject doing something hinting at cultural differences between Roma and the majority population in this respect.

No witness protection law

Victims of human rights violations fear vengeance of the perpetrators. That is why many crimes are not accounted for. There is no protection in case of revenge. Even The Hague War Crimes Tribunal witnesses are not protected in Kosovo. After the latest trial against Ramush Haradinaj the crown witness of the accusal, his son and his cousin were murdered. A further Roma-witness to this trial was run over by a car.

The Kosovo parliament categorically rejects to name an independent ombudsman even though many human rights complaints are being ignored. The successor of the former ombudsman, Marek Antoni Nowicki is Hilmi Jashari as „acting ombudsman“. Society for Threatened Peoples regrets to state that since 20 months Jashari, an ethnic Albanian, has hardly done anything in the matter of human rights.

Eight years after the end of the Kosovo war UNMIK and KFOR have failed to establish large-scale protection measures for minorities as well as European standards in the human rights domain. Society for Threatened Peoples stands for the right to self-determination and security guarantees for ethnic minorities. These guarantees are necessary for the solution of the status of Kosovo and the future of this region.

Society for Threatened Peoples calls on the Council:

- to urge the Albanian and Serbian side to abide by international human rights standards.
- to urge the Kosovo institutions to take into account the legitimate rights and interests of the minorities. All of them need to be included in negotiations about the future status of Kosovo.
- to take steps towards the establishment of medical centers specializing in the treatment of ecological illnesses in a politically neutral place in Kosovo.
- to initiate humanitarian and financial aid for the Roma and Ashkali minorities in Kosovo.
