



# Kosova Women's Network

Serving, Protecting and Promoting the Rights of Women and Girls

May 26, 2006

**To:** Soren Jessen-Peterson, UNMIK Special Representative to the Secretary General

**Copied to:** Kai Vittrup, UNMIK Police Commissioner

**From:** Igballe Rogova, Executive Director, Kosova Women's Network

**Subject:** Incident in Krusha e Vogel village, Kosovo on 25 May 2006

Dear Soren Jessen-Petersen,

I am writing to present the events that occurred on 25 May 2006, during a United Nations Mission in Kosova (UNMIK) fact-finding mission to the village of Krusha e Vogel, as a supplement to the official reports submitted by the UNMIK police. As a human rights and women's rights activist for more than 17 years, I have worked closely with the community of Krusha e Vogel since 1999 and am well-aware of the political and social context there. Here, I will explain that context and present recommendations for future UNMIK work.

## **I. The Events that Occurred**

Within twelve hours of the incident, I collected more than 30 personal testimonies from Krusha e Vogel citizens who were at the scene. These testimonies showed that the following occurred:

Twelve UNMIK police armored vehicles carrying Serbs who used to live in Krusha e Vogel village arrived there at 09:15 in the morning on 25 May 2006. According to Kai Vittrup, UNMIK Police Commissioner, they were there to collect information for The Hague. The convoy arrived completely unannounced, without informing elected officials, public institutions, the Kosovo Police Service (KPS), or anyone in the village that they were coming. When they arrived, an UNMIK police officer asked a young girl, Mehreme Batusha (12), where the house of the Batusha family (Albanian) was. The house was formerly occupied by the Mistic family (Serb). The girl pointed to the house.

While the vehicle was stopped Nazmije Avdyli (70) saw Bora Cvetkovic and Gordana Djordjevic, two citizens who had lived in the village before the war, inside one of the vehicles. Nazmije Avdyli immediately yelled, "They are coming back!" Women, who were on their way to work in the fields (carrying pitchforks to move grass), gathered near the UNMIK vehicles when they heard her yelling.

Shpresa Shehu, a teacher, long-time activist, and leader of the village, approached the UNMIK police representatives on behalf of the women and asked if the women could speak with the passengers in the car who they believed to be their former Serb neighbors. The women wanted to ask the passengers what had happened to the bodies of their husbands and children, missing since the war. The UNMIK police officer refused their request.

Then, the women from Krusha e Vogel sat in the middle of the road, preventing the UNMIK armored vehicles from moving forward. The UNMIK police officers grabbed the women by the shoulders and arms, physically, forcibly moving them from the road. When the women struggled, the police officers began to use riot batons. The women responded by throwing stones at the UNMIK police officers and vehicles. In the meantime, men saw what was happening and came to protect the women. When the men came, some of the UNMIK police officers started their vehicles, while others

continued to hit the villagers with the butts of their guns and riot batons. Then, all of the officers jumped in their armored vehicles. As they drove away, they threw tear gas from their moving vehicles at the citizens until they reached the edge of the village. They also threw tear gas near the school where children were playing during recess.

According to Prizren hospital records, 36 people were admitted that afternoon, including three men and 33 women. Of the three men, all had physical injuries. Twenty children were treated for wounds associated with tear gas. That evening, 22 adults and the children were released. On 26 May, 14 people remained in the hospital. Of these, one boy has a broken arm, and 13 women suffer from psychological trauma. They are also being treated for tear gas as well as light physical injuries that resulted from the UNMIK police. One woman is being treated for serious injuries to her kidneys after being hit in the back with a riot baton.

On the evening of 26 May, a meeting was called with Kai Vittrup at 20:00 in Krusha e Vogel village. The meeting was attended by citizens from the village, Sheremet Ahmeti – Deputy Commissioner of KPS, and Eqrem Kryeziu – Mayor of Prizren Municipality. At the meeting, Kai Vittrup said that it was not democratic for the citizens of Krusha e Vogel to use violence towards people who came to conduct an investigation. He repeatedly stressed the need for them to act “democratically” and to remember that their actions would influence the “final status talks.”

## II. Conclusions and Recommendations

In order to understand the psychological trauma that the citizens of Krusha e Vogel experienced as a result of this visit, one must first understand the history of Krusha e Vogel. On 26 March 1999, 114 Albanian men over the age of 13 (70% of the men in the village) were separated from their families and massacred by their own Serb neighbors. The homes of Albanian families were burned to the ground, their cattle were killed, and their fields destroyed. The women and children who survived were chased by their Serb neighbors and paramilitary forces to the Drini River, where they were told either to drown themselves or walk to Albania. Citizens from a neighboring village came to their rescue, carrying them across the river with tractors. A few days later, they traveled to Albania where they remained for three months as refugees.

The citizens who returned to Krusha e Vogel after the war, mostly women and children, were in mourning. Despite their immense human and economic loss, they have worked to move forward. They have participated in democratic structures. They have learned to plough their fields, drive tractors, sell their products, and make a living independently (formerly jobs solely for men). They have met with each other week after week to talk about what happened and to try to overcome the pain and trauma they experienced, towards psychological healing.

Those who committed crimes in Krusha e Vogel have yet to be identified, arrested, tried, or punished. In other words, criminals continue to roam free today. There has been no official apology from politicians or decision-makers in regards to what occurred in Krusha e Vogel in 1999.

First, there is the issue of psychological trauma. The UNMIK police officers used physical violence on the women that reminded them of the violence that they had experienced only seven years ago when they were physically separated from their family members. Marta Prekpalaj, an experienced activist of two decades who works with Motrat Qiriazi Association for the Education of Women and who used a tractor to rescue the women and children from the village the night they were forced out of their homes in 1999, has worked closely with the Krusha e Vogel citizens since then. In a phone interview on 26 May she said, “I saw the exact same expressions on their faces yesterday as I saw the day that their homes were burned and their family members were killed.” The UNMIK police have re-traumatized them, she said.

Second, it must be emphasized that the women *did not throw stones at Serbs*. They threw stones at the UNMIK police who had physically assaulted them.

Third, that the women of Krusha e Vogel requested to *speak* with the Serbs being transported in the vehicles is a sign of democracy. Through proper planning with local activists, organizations, and village leaders, UNMIK could have fostered a peaceful discussion and visit to this community.

Fourth, the actions of the UNMIK police could be described as undemocratic: they failed to inform any of the democratic institutions about their visit; they used unnecessary violence against women and children; and, they refused for the women to communicate with the people they were transporting.

Fifth, the citizens of Kosovo fully support The Hague and the process of justice. This event demonstrates the need to involve local institutions and citizens in order for the processes of justice to be successful.

Sincerely,

Igballe Rogova