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Monks of Holy Archangels Monastery pressured by German KFOR after reporting truth about Djakovica incident

Bishop Artemije: "I am horrified by this treatment of my monks. Such behavior on the part of the German military contingent is leading to the complete expulsion of the Orthodox Church from this region where it remained and survived for centuries, even during Turkish occupation."

The Diocese of Raska-Prizren and Kosovo-Metohija expresses its sharpest protest against the intolerant behavior of German KFOR toward monks of the Monastery of Holy Archangels near Prizren.



Holy Archangels Monastery near Prizren - Encircled by barbed wire for almost 5 years
Larger photo <http://www.kosovo.com/esarhangel.html>

ERP KIM Info Service
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Following the incident in Djakovica on January 21, 2004 when a group of about 30 Albanians attacked a German KFOR vehicle transporting monks of the Holy Archangels Monastery and a German TV crew filming the ruins of the Orthodox Church of the Holy Trinity in the center of town, the life of the monks of the only remaining monastery in the area of responsibility of German KFOR has gotten much worse. KFOR escorts for the monastery have been discontinued with the explanation that all future escorts must be requested from Albanians in the Kosovo Police Service. The monks are no longer able to use the German military electrical generator they have been using until now, and the Orthodox priest on duty in the Bishop's residence in Prizren is being denied food.

Immediately after the above incident in Djakovica, lieutenant colonel Klaus Ehlers, the spokesman for German KFOR who was himself present when the incident occurred, expressed displeasure that the news regarding an attack by a group of Albanians on KFOR vehicles was publicly released, while making a statement for ARD German state television that any incident had occurred (as reported in the Serbian daily press, Vecernje Novosti). Abbot German Vucicevic (pr. Gher-man voo-CHEE-che-vich, Eng. version Fr. Herman) of Holy Archangels Monastery immediately wrote a letter to representatives of German KFOR, asking them to at least issue an official statement to inform the public regarding the attack which not only jeopardized the lives of the monks present but also resulted in damage to KFOR vehicles, if they were not prepared to investigate the incident fully together with UNMIK police.

More about incident in Djakovica in our Newsletter:
http://www.kosovo.com/erpkininfo_jan04/erpkininfo22jan04.html



Security checkpoint at entrance to Holy Archangels Monastery near Prizren
- KFOR may withdraw security completely within days, say the monks

German KFOR no longer allows use of military generator

The response to Fr. Herman's letter came quickly but not in written form. "The German troops protecting the monastery suddenly began to act differently towards us. Two days after the incident in Djakovica, they informed us that, "due to technical reasons", they are no longer able to allow the monastery to continue using the 64KW electrical generator which they use for operations. You can imagine what it is like to be without electricity for hours at a time in the cold winter months. The capacity of the generator, from the technical aspect, is sufficient for both military operations and the monastery, and presently at least 40KW are being wasted," said Fr. Herman. The explanation of the German troops was that the generator, which has been providing electricity for the checkpoint and the monastery, "does not have the required capacity". The monastery is frequently exposed to power blackouts, like most Serb enclaves in Kosovo and Metohija, and electricity is out more than it is on during the day.

The following day, German KFOR's captain **Mike Stiehlers** visited the monastery on behalf of the German command and told the monks that they could hardly have expected a different reception in Djakovica, considering "that the Serbs killed many Albanians there". Stiehlers was especially critical of Bishop Artemije, who is "constantly insisting on Resolution 1244, and that Kosovo is a part of Serbia". The monks replied that the Serbian Orthodox Church is not responsible for what happened during the armed conflict, and that following his logic, the very presence of Serbs in Kosovo seems to be a justified reason for a frenzied mob to carry out a public street lynching with impunity. The monks were especially

surprised that German KFOR is bothered by Resolution 1244, the basis for its mandate in Kosovo, and the provision that Kosovo is an integral part of Serbia-Montenegro.

Not so much as a crust of bread

On the same day Fr. Benedict (Preradovic - pr. preh-RAH-doh-vich), the priest on duty in the Bishop's residence in Prizren, advised the monastery that German troops housed in the residence and protecting the building and the nearby Orthodox Cathedral of St. George have stopped providing him with food. Namely, for more than four years the monks of Holy Archangels Monastery and Diocesan priests have maintained a regular presence in the residence due to meet the needs of some 60 remaining Prizren Serbs, most of them elderly. Religious services are regularly provided for them in the church. The on duty priest is not able to leave the immediate grounds of the residence due to security reasons and previously German KFOR troops have provided this priest with food, which he cannot obtain otherwise on his own. However, the soldiers simply informed Fr. Benedict that they are not allowed to give him so much as a piece of bread because "these are the written orders of lieutenant colonel Kai Brinkmann", the current commander of the German military group for Prizren (Task Force Prizren).

"Supposedly they are short on food themselves," said Fr. Benedict, "so short that they can no longer supply the on duty priest. The explanation is totally unconvincing because at the end of every day there is a lot of leftover food which is thrown away, especially bread, since they receive fresh bread daily. However, when I asked them to at least set aside what was left over at the end of the day, they repeated that they were under strict orders not to give food to monks."



German armored transporter heading column of Serb vehicles on their way to celebrate the patron saints' day of Holy Archangels Monastery in summer 2002. Albanian extremists had planted 11 kg. of volatile explosives in hill above monastery but only a few hundred grams exploded due to the heavy rain. An explosion would have resulted in the collapse of the cliff on several hundred faithful and the Bishop, who was serving Holy Liturgy in the monastery churchyard at the time. An investigation was never conducted and the entire incident hushed up to avoid conflict with local Albanian extremists which freely operate in the area for years.

German KFOR cancels military escorts for monks

Finally, the monks were informed that German KFOR would no longer provide escorts for monks on visits to Prizren or in the direction of Decani and the Pec Patriarchate. "They already cancelled escorts towards Pristina and Gračanica for us almost a year ago. Since then, we have been making do, traveling at our risk across Mt. Brezovica on the main highway from the FYR Macedonian border toward Mitrovica," said Abbot Herman. "There is always a risk involved. One of our monks, Fr. Chariton Lukic, was kidnapped by Albanians after the deployment of German KFOR. His headless body was later found bearing marks of torture and mutilation. Fr. Chariton was kidnapped in the very center of Prizren despite the fact that German KFOR was already deployed in the area," he added. Although the monks have reduced their requests for escorts to a minimum (once weekly to Prizren and at least once monthly to one of the Serb enclaves, Decani or the Pec Patriarchate), the escorts have now been entirely cancelled with the explanation that future heading requests should be made to the Albanians in the Kosovo Police Service.

The monks are convinced that this represents a serious violation of the religious rights of the Serb people in the Prizren area, as the brotherhood of Holy Archangels is the only one providing religious services for the Prizren area and the returnee village of Novake. As a result of the decision of German KFOR, the remaining Serbs in this area will be denied Holy Liturgy and all other priestly services.



Also discontinued are regular escorts for monks to Church of the Most Holy Mother of God "Bogorodica Ljeviska" in Prizren. Photo shows a recent visit there secured by German KFOR troops. Without military escorts, the monks say, it will be impossible to safely conduct services in the 14th century church, which is no longer under constant KFOR protection, nor in other Prizren churches. A few days ago a utility building next to the Church "Bogorodica Ljeviska" was robbed. Monks are unaware that any investigation of the incident was conducted, while German officers are not even aware the incident occurred. The Diocese has already expressed serious concerns for this important Serb patrimonial site.

Lieutenant colonel Brinkmann's cynical grin

After the implementation of all these measures by the German KFOR contingent with the obvious intention of castigating the monks for publicly reporting the news of the incident in Djakovica, Fr. Herman requested a meeting with lieutenant colonel Kai Brinkmann, who arrived in Holy Archangels Monastery on January 30, 2004. During his discussion with Abbot Herman, lieutenant colonel Brinkmann accused the monks of making an unwise decision in requesting the filming of the Church of the Holy Trinity in Djakovica. In response, Abbot Herman explained to the German officer that the monks had only suggested the filming of a destroyed church; the decision to stop in front of the ruins of the church was made by a German officer in consultation with representatives of the German TV crew. Fr. Herman also told Brinkmann that the monks are particularly hurt by the fact that after the expulsion of 200,000 Serbs, the murder and kidnapping of over 2,000 and the destruction or damage of over 100 churches, such incidents continue to go unpunished. On top of everything, Serbs are held responsible if they so much as wish to visit their destroyed churches. Thus, the Serbs are prevented from even visiting their destroyed churches, let alone restoring them.

Abbot Herman told the German officer that security has not substantially improved. "Only a few days ago, a utility building next to the Church of the Mother of God "Bogorodica Ljeviska" (14th century) was robbed even though the entire church complex is supposed to be secured." Brinkmann said that he was not aware of this incident. When asked why the daily meal of the on duty priest in the Bishop's palace in Prizren had been discontinued, Brinkmann said that "they no longer have enough cooks". He also told Fr. Herman that the electrical generator will no longer be able to provide power for the monastery. When the Abbot asked why the German troops did not repair the damage to the access road to the monastery by armored vehicles, Brinkmann coolly replied that "he doesn't have any engineers" and that the important thing was that the damage did not hurt KFOR vehicles.

Fr. Herman told Brinkmann that such measures on the part of German KFOR represent pressure on the only remaining German monastery in the German area of responsibility and that they make a minimum

level of safety for the monks impossible, to which he replied that he is "only responsible for the lives of his soldiers". The conversation ended with the following words:

Abbot Herman: *Such decisions on your part make our position much more difficult. I am not certain that the monastery will be able to survive under such conditions. If the monks are forced to leave the monastery, it will be a serious blow for all the Serbs who have returned and some of them will certainly seek to leave Kosovo again, while those who are in Serbia will be discouraged from returning.*

lieutenant colonel Brinkmann: *That will be your decision.*

Upon leaving the monastery the German officer grinned cynically, telling Fr. Herman that "it had been a pleasure" (sic)! "I can't say I found it pleasant," Abbot Herman replied calmly.



In February 2003 a UNESCO delegation inspected ruins of the Church of the Mother of God "Hodegetria" in Musutiste nr. Prizren, built in 1315. Albanians blew it up using explosives in summer of 1999 and chopped down the pine forest in the churchyard. Larger photo <http://www.kosovo.com/unesco02.jpg>

Thirty holy shrines destroyed in German sector

Despite the efforts of the Diocese to encourage a reexamination of these decisions on the part of German KFOR, nothing has changed for the better for the monks of Holy Archangels in the last several days. Soldiers protecting the monastery are even saying that KFOR may completely discontinue protection for the monastery and the Bishop's palace, **the last two buildings of the Serbian Orthodox Church still under the direct protection of German peacekeeping forces.** It is hardly necessary to discuss the consequences of such a decision, resulting in the abandonment of yet another important Serbian patrimonial site to the mercy, or lack thereof, of Albanian extremists.

Since the end of armed conflict and the deployment of KFOR in June 1999 **30 Orthodox Christian churches and monasteries** have been destroyed just in area of responsibility of German KFOR. Among the destroyed holy shrines are the Church of the Most Holy Theotokos Hodegetria in Musutiste near Suva Reka (built in 1315); Holy Trinity Monastery near Suva Reka (14th century); the Monasteries of St. Mark, and the Holy Wonderworkers and Unmercenaries Cosmas and Damian (Sveti Vradi - 14th century), as well as several other medieval churches including the Church of St. Nicholas (Raykova crkva - 14th century) in the center of Prizren. As a matter of fact, in the area of Prizren some of the most important medieval Serbian churches were blown up by Kosovo Albanian extremists, right in front of eyes of the German KFOR.

Not one of the perpetrators of these attacks have yet been found and brought to justice; indeed, there is no evidence that investigations were ever conducted. Despite all the efforts to restore the Monastery of Sts. Cosmas and Damian in Zociste, German KFOR representatives persistently claim that the

necessary security conditions do not exist for the restoration of the monastery or the return of the Serb population of the village of Zociste due to the opposition of the local Albanian population. In 2001 Bishop Artemije visited the monastery with Albanian representatives of the Kovoo Government and the then U.S. chief of Mission Mr. Menzies. Despite promises the monastery still lies in ruins and even its remains were set on fire in summer 2002. At the same time, German KFOR decided a few days ago to discontinue a military checkpoint in the village of Velika Hoca (pr. Hocha), only five kilometers away, because of the alleged improvement in the security situation - to the enormous concern of the local Serbian population of the enclave.

The position of the Diocese of Raska and Prizren is clear: German KFOR has the authority to completely discontinue protection for buildings of the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Serb people remaining in this area. But, at the same time, it will be directly responsible for any incident which may happen due to lack of security. Such a decision will seriously discourage further returns of expelled Serbs in the Prizren area and is directly contrary to the basic task of the UN civil mission in Kosovo and Metohija, which is to enable the restoration of a multiethnic society in the Province.

Bishop Artemije horrified by actions of German KFOR



"The behavior of German KFOR represents a direct threat to the religious rights of Orthodox Serbs in the Prizren area," said Bishop Artemije during a telephone interview from the U.S., where he is currently visiting. "My monks are not only protecting their monastery but also carrying out religious services to meet the needs of the remaining people. They are taking care of their spiritual and humanitarian needs. If the monks are completely isolated within the walls of their monastery in this manner, the few remaining Serbs in the Prizren area will have no possibility of attending Holy Liturgy, baptizing children, going to confession or being buried. Such behavior on the part of the German military contingent is leading to the complete expulsion of the Orthodox Church from this region where it remained and survived for centuries, even during the Ottoman occupation."

"This represents a outrageous example of punishing the monks for no other reason than that they reported the truth regarding the incident in Djakovica. German KFOR not only failed to react to that incident but attempted to cover up the fact that it ever occurred," concluded Bishop Artemije.

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