

ALBANIAN HUMAN RIGHTS GROUP

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Refugees's Testimonies

(Tirana 15 - 21, April 1999)

Tirana 15, April 1999

The refugee camp in the former factory Dinamo

1 - R. Th., 45 years old from Peja

She tells:

The Serb security and military forces attacked the town of Peja on 26 March 1999. The town was attacked with artillery and looted almost every night. My husband is a journalist, thus the Serbs wrote the letter "M" on the gate of our house, which meant that the place would have been massacred. The "Black Hand of Arkan" (the Arkan forces) also participated in the crackdown. We were forced to leave our house on 28 March 1999, at 10:00h. We were gathered at the center where we were forced to get on a military vehicle. We were about 100 on that vehicle. The trip was terrible. The Serb driver harassed us and drove like crazy, but the fate helped us. On the way, there were several checkpoints of the Serb forces. They robbed us all the money and jewellery we had with us. The ultimate control occurred at the border with Albania.

There was no KLA unit operating in Peja, meanwhile there were several units operating in the surrounding villages.

The Serb attack against the town of Peja caused many civilian casualties, burning of houses etc. Thus, Haxhi Mihci is executed inside his house following attempts to escape. The Serb forces entered the house of our neighbor that refused to leave. They killed him immediately.

All the Serbs that lived in Peja were involved in the Serb military operations of ethnic cleansing.

The Serb crackdown in Peja started since the month of February. They attacked the town with artillery.

2 - Z. K. 60 years old from Peja.

She tells:

The Serb military forces started their crackdown against the town of Peja on 26 March 1999. They shot with artillery fire. The Serb paramilitary executed those that refused to leave from home. We stayed for four days inside being frightened and terrified about the consequences of the attacks. On Monday, 29 March 1999, at 12:00, 8 Serb soldiers entered by force in our house. We were driven out. Then they started looting and burning. We were brought at the bus. I witnessed the execution of a 60 year old man. I also saw that the Serb forces cut the throat of Xhelal Hoxha, 28 years old, who was subsequently thrown in the black water channel. Around 3000 people started walking in the direction of Gjakova. On the way, our column was joined by other people. We were halted in several checkpoints set up by the Serb police who exerted a heavy pressure upon us. In Decan, the men were separated from the women, then we were subjected to a search. The Serb forces robbed us everything. Pasing through Gjakova, we saw burned houses. I also saw the murder of a young man who was not known by me. We walked for two days and two nights without eating anything. We had no clothes for the children. We were again subjected to a search in Gjakova. The Serbs took away all our money, passports and other precious objects.

I have left my 76 year old mother behind in Peja and I don't know what happened to her. She had gone by her sister on the deportation day and I don't know whether she left or not.

3 - S. M. 19 years old from Celina

She tells:

The Serb forces arrived in our village on 25 March 1999. They looted and burned the houses. We were gathered at the backyard of a house where we were kept from 9:00 to 18:00h. The Serb forces separated apart 10 young men telling them that if they refuse to pay 3000DM, they would be executed. Then we went to the mountains where we spent four days under very difficult conditions. In the meantime the Serb forces continued to burn every neighboring village.

After the pressure exerted upon us by the Serb soldiers who killed a young man in the mountains, we left to the village of Krusha e Vogel. On the way, the men were separated from the women, and were beaten up. The Serb stole all their money and took their passports.

We were informed that the husband of my aunt and her two sons were killed in Krusha e Vogel. The Serbs subjected us to another search at the border. They took all our I.D. documents telling us: "Now leave to your country because now you have NATO with you".

Madhe, Celina, Bellacerk, Nagovc, Hoci i vogel, Bejstovc, Optrush, Ret, Zocisht, Rudbrave and Krush.

4 - F. K. from Peja

Her family consisted of nine members. She told us about the terror that she and her family had gone through:

When the Serbs started the attack against the village, she and her family were given shelter by a neighbor Serb family. They were guaranteed that they would be defended

from the Serb police, but the contrary occurred: at the time when the village was completely emptied following the deportation, they were kept hostages by the Serb family that wanted to hand them over to the police. They tried to kill F.'s husband, but he and his family members managed to escape.

5- F. H. from Gjakova tells:

Our trip to the Albanian border lasted 5 days. I was travelling together with my mother and three sisters. My oldest brother is a KLA fighter. The Serb forces arrived in the village at 20:30h and drove out by force 100 families of the village, torched the houses and shot in the middle of the crowd. Two families of Gjakova were burned alive at midnight. So died the members of the Vestaj family, besides a mother and her son, that at the time of the arson were by their relatives. Meanwhile the members of the Zherkaj family were atrociously beaten up and subsequently burned alive inside their household.

Zeq Kuqi, a medical doctor was killed in the hospital. His two sons were also executed.

Fatimja reported us about numerous bodies that she saw on her way to the Albanian border. Many of those belonged to young men, some bodies were burned, some others had the noses and ears cut off. She stated that the Serbs hit them with the butts of the guns telling them: "This is not your country. This is Serbia. Go to Albania, go to NATO".

6 - J. B. from the village of Dobrodalan of Suhareka

He tells:

Our house was attacked by a cannon. We went out terrified, got on a tractor and left. While we were leaving they shot the house again. My son left together with his friends before us. We went to Pagarush where we passed three days by our relatives. But that village was also attacked, so that we were again obliged to leave. This time we went to Dragobe. The Serb started their crackdown in this village too. We left once again to Malisheva, where we stayed for another two days. The Serb police exerted violence against us and demanded us money. Then the Serbs burned all our means of transport. We walked in a column that consisting of about 50 000 people. At a checkpoint, the Serb police separated the 18 to 55 year old men from women and children. We spend a whole night in a field and started our walk on the next day. It was raining heavily on that day. We were exhausted, wet through and hungry. Finally we reached the town of Kukes.

Tirana 21, April 1999

**7 - H. V, 47 years old, from the village of Beleg - The Commune of Decan
Interviewed on 21 April 1999 in the house of E.B.**

She tells:

My family and I lived in the village of Beleg, the Commune of Decan. We left our home

on 29 March 1999 together with my daughter in law, F. V. and her children, Dorentina, Venera, Lundrim, and Kushtrim V, as well as with my daughter's family that had stayed at my place since August 1998, after their house situated in the village of Herec, the Commune of Gjakova, was burned. The Serb soldiers and police drove us out by force. On 27 March 1999 our house was surrounded by the Serb forces and we were blocked inside following a warning that if we went out, would be shot. We left from our house upon the order of the Serbs, who subsequently subjected us to ill-treatment. My back was hit by the butt of a gun. The Serbs repeated continuously: "Go by NATO, as you have asked for NATO". This occurred on Monday, 28 March 1999, at 10:00h. Then we were sent in the basement of another house that was situated at a large distance from our house, and we stayed there for another 24 hour time.

After the second floor of the house was torched - we were about 70 inside that basement - , four persons, namely Naim Vishaj, Daut Alickaj, Nazer V. and Qazim Hulaj, attempted to escape. The Serb police opened fire against them. As a consequence of the shooting Naim, Daut and Qazim died immediately, Nazer was wounded in the mouth, his tongue was cut off, so he can't speak. The Serb had shot from a 2 metres distance. Then an old lady whose name I don't remember appeared at the gate and raised a white scarf. The Serbs entered inside and robbed and raided everything we had: money, jewellery, documents and other precious object. Inside the basement, the men were separated from the women, and all of us, including a six months old baby, were subjected to a search. We were forced to get on a tractor that drove us to the Albanian border, besides my son Fatmir V. , 33, the father in law of my daughter, Taf Dinaj, 65 and 20 others who were detained by the Serbs. Insofar I have no news from them.

The Serb police were wearing dark blue (or black) uniforms. I knew one of them. His first name was Zoran. Meanwhile the Serb soldiers had green uniforms. Some uniforms carried the emblem of the white eagle, representing Seselj forces.

On 8 September 1998, the village of Beleg was attacked and entirely burned by the Serb military and security forces. They attacked us with tanks, armoured cars, and other weaponry. The houses of Naim Visha, Adem Visha, Nazer Visha, Halil Visha, Met Visha etc., were burned.

There were no Serb nationals living in our village.

During the deportation period, no KLA unit was operating in the village of Beleg. Instead, they were operating in the village of Rapish.

During the trip to the Albanian border, we were often stopped by Serb forces who asked us for money and documents. We also saw several dead bodies, particularly at the place known as "The Holy Bridge", close to Gjakova.

The Serb forces stopped us again at the border and asked for money, gold and documents. But we were thoroughly robbed during the trip.

***8 - N. S. 27 years old, from the village of Opterush - The Commune of Rahovec
Interviewed on 21 April 1999 at the Palace of Sport "Asllan Rusi".***

He tells:

My family, (consisting of 5 members) and I together with my uncle's family left Opterush on 28 August 1998, following the Serb assault against our village. We found refuge in the

village of Krusha e Madhe where we passed 8 months. One day after the beginning of the NATO bombardments against Yugoslavia, the Serb security and military forces drove us out and forced us to go to the mountains. We spent two days in the mountains. There were around 60 000 people coming from Krusha e Madhe, Celina, Bellacerk, Nagavc, Hoci i vogel, Bejstovc, Opterush, Ret, Zocisht, Rudbrave and Krusha e Vogel. The place where we were settled was surrounded by the Serb forces at 9:00 in the morning. The police forces were masked, they had dark uniforms bearing the sign "policia" on the back. The soldiers wore combat green uniforms. They had red bands tied around the hats and around the arms. The uniforms of the Seselj forces had an emblema consisting of a white eagle and a cross with the letter "c" in its four angles.

Then we went to the village of Negovc where we passed 5 days until the Serbs started bombing the village with artillery. Around 400-500 persons had found refuge in each house of the village. The victims were numerous. My 6 months old nephew (the son of M. B.) and my uncle's wife were among the victims. Agim Bytyci, 19, and Nait Bytyci, 35 also died on that day. We left for Albania on 01:30. On the road, we were stopped by a postblock of the Serb police. They took us all the money, and jewellery. They hurled on the ground the white hats of the men and stamped them. They also took all our identity documents. We saw around 15 dead bodies belonging to children, women, old men and young men, along the road from Landovici to the Albanian border. In the vicinity of the border, while we were staying inside tractors and other vehicles, we heard several shootings. We went out of the vehicles and saw a 30 year old man shot in his chest by the Serbs. This occurred on 22 March 1999. I did not recognize him. I can only tell that we left his body behind. The Serbs subjected us to another search at the border taking away any left money, jewellery or documents.

Our village had around 3000 inhabitants, 60 of which were KLA members. They could not resist the Serb crackdown on the village and escaped to the mountains. The son of my uncle, Shemsedin Spahiu, is a KLA fighter.

My three uncles and their families have remained in Kosova: M. Spahiu, 70, in Rahovec; A. Spahiu, 68, in Radost; F. Spahiu, 55, in Prizren.

Apart from the latest Serb offensive, our village has been attacked 5 times. All the houses were raided prior to being burned.

There were 7 Serb families in the village, but no damage was affected to any of those.

The Serbs attacked the village with tanks, armoured cars, snipers etc. For instance, the house of Halim Bytyci from the village of Ofterush and the mosque were destroyed by a racket.

Several people died before the middle of March 1999. In the summer of 1998, four persons were executed: Isak Mazreku, Bexhet Mazreku and his wife Shyrete Mazreku, Hamiz Mazreku. They had not left from the village in August 1998. I still have no knowledge on where their corpses are.

***9 - A. S. 40 years old, from the village of Ofterush, the Commune of Rahovec
Interviewed on 21 April 1999 in the Palace of Sport "Asllan Rusi"***

She tells:

My children (four daughters and one son) and I left for Albania around a month ago. The

Serb forces attacked our village and likewise the other inhabitants of the village, we were forced to leave. We were settled in the mountains and were surrounded by the Serb security and military forces. The police wore dark colour uniforms and held white bands tied around the arms. The soldiers wore green combat uniforms. They separated men from women. No men was allowed to join us, besides my son, Mentor and a 70 year old man. They robbed all our money, jewellery and I.D. documents. Being the only men in our column, my son was beaten up several times during the trip. His leg became swollen and he reached the Albanian border with great difficulty. The Serb soldiers put a knife on his throat and a gun on the chest. We walked in columns consisting of two lines. We were thus ordered and simultaneously warned that those who refused or went out of the column would be shot dead. Close to Qafe Morina (the Morina pass) we signed a paper and left our fingerprint on a document providing that we were leaving Kosova upon our free will. They often used the expression: "Go by Clinton, he will help you. See this place for the last time, as you will never see it again".

Some inhabitants of our village were KLA members, including my relatives Shemsedin S. Ali S. Blerim S. Selajdin S. and Latif S. They made a three days resistance to the Serb soldiers to defend our village, but they were outnumbered by the Serbs, so that they fled to the mountains.

There were several Serb families in our village, but nobody touched them, although the village was burned several times since the summer of 1998. The houses of the Serbs were not burned, although they had already left.

The uncle's son of my husband, Xhemal Spahiu, and his wife Qamile Spahiu, Fiqirie Spahiu, her 12 year daughter Ilirana Spahiu, Marigona Spahiu, 8 years old, Lirim Spahiu, 4 years old and the daughter of Xhemal Spahiu, Dardana Zhunici 9 years old that left our village in July 1998, were all massacred. The only survivor was Dibran Zhunici, 6 years old. He was covered by the dead bodies of the aforementioned persons. He was taken by his uncle, S. Zh. from the village of Xerxe. The bodies of the victims were buried by a villager in a mass grave.

10 - G. P, 32 years old, from Peja

Interviewed on 21 April 1999 in the house of A. Rama

She tells:

I lived in the town of Peja. On 26 March 1999, the Serb soldiers entered our house and

told us to leave within 3 minutes. They warned to shoot us should we refuse to leave. The women and children were staying in the basement of the house since three days, and the men were living on the upper floors. My father in law, Ramiz Pishtani, my husband, Nazer Pishtani and my brother in law, Enver Pishtani were hitted by the Serbs with the butts of the guns. Then the Serbs placed us against a wall and subjected to a search. My sister in law, Lylavere P. who was sick and stayed in bed, was unable to join us. My husband went to help her to get up, but the Serb soldiers prohibited him. They dragged my sister in law to the place where the rest of family where. We brought her to Kukes with a coach. Now she is in the hospital No.1 in Tirana.

The Serbs wore green combat uniforms. They had emblemias on the hats, but I don't know what do they represent.

We travelled to the Albanian border by bus. We were accompanied by the inhabitants of Suhareka, Has, Prizren, Krusha e Madhe.

I know nothing about my family that lived in the village of Kashica.

When I had gone to visit my parents that lived in Kashica about two months ago, three Serb police came there and demanded for weapons and money. They looted the house. They also took a small bed-side-table prepared by my brother. He was a joiner.

Three days prior to our deportation, at 09:00h, Peja was attacked by the Serb forces. The attack lasted the whole day long. Lots of houses were completely burned. Two large busnissmen, Shaban Likaj and Qazim (I don't remember his surname) lived close to our place. Their households were looted and they were threatened with murder. This happenned to other families as well, but I was a just married woman so that I did not recognize them very well.

There were no Serb families settled close to our house.

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