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Ethnic Violence in Kosovo



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Summary

Following June 1999 the Serbs in Kosovo have been having a hard time. After the withdrawal of the Serbian army and the police they became the targets for the KLA and criminal groups. Numerous murders, abductions and property destruction happened in the presence of the international forces. The absence of KFOR's reaction persuaded even those Albanians who were against violence that the international community was supporting the idea of the extreme political groups that Kosovo should be free of the Serbs. On 17 March, with the exception of Mitrovicë/Mitrovica, UNMIK and KFOR, once again and primarily through their omission to act, encouraged the Albanian extremists. This time however, they also turned openly against UNMIK and KFOR. On 17 March, the first day of violence they sent the UNMIK police fleeing for shelter in KFOR bases. On 18 March they continued their Serb hunt, unobstructed by the international troops and with the tacit approval of Albanian political leaders. It seemed that their plan was "throw them out of their houses and burn the property".

For two days a small group of Serbs kept up a roadblock on the Prishtinë/Priština-Skopje/Shkup highway in protest against the attack on and wounding of a young man from Čaglavica/Çagllavicë. KFOR reaction became more vigorous only when it appeared that the Albanian demonstrators from Prishtinë/Priština might break into Čaglavica/Çagllavicë. The Albanian rally in southern Mitrovicë/Mitrovica on 17 March after the tragic death of three small boys from Çabrë/Čabra grew into an attempt to 'liberate' northern Mitrovica/Mitrovicë. KFOR confronted the demonstrators and prevented it. As for the other incidents, the KFOR troops, which went around gathering Serbs from their houses or accepted them after expulsion, looked more like rescue teams. They left behind unguarded Serb houses claiming that they were not mandated to use arms and endanger the lives of their soldiers. Serb houses in Svinjare/Frashër near southern Mitrovicë/Mitrovica, the last Serb houses in Prizren and Ferizaj/Uroševac, the houses of returnees in Belo Polje/Bellopojë near Pejë/Peć and the Ashkali locality in Vushtrri/Vučitrn were all looted and demolished with the KFOR troops present.

After the March violence the UNMIK police lost the respect of the Serbs. On occasions they refused to help elderly persons as was the case, for instance, in Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje when a policeman fled with his family leaving an 80-year old woman at the mercy of the demonstrators.

The events of 17 –18 March show that the KPS [Kosovo Police Service] members acted without proper command or instructions waiting for their political leaders to tell them what to do. Since the Albanian political leaders kept silent waiting to see the outcome in the field and since there were no UNMIK police in the streets, the KPS was left to choose between lending its support to the demonstrators and the professional conduct. Some of them sided with the demonstrators and joined in the destruction of property. The vast majority of them just looked on and refrained from intervention even as the demonstrators beat the Serbs. A significant number of Kosovo policemen participated in the evacuation and some Serbs see it as an indirect participation in their expulsion whereas others believe that they saved their lives by doing so.

That things are not as black as they seem, is demonstrated by instances of solidarity shown by individual Albanians towards their Serb neighbours and colleagues. Following the bidding of their conscience, some individuals tried to help the Serbs by taking them off the streets, calling the police or taking them to KFOR bases. In rural areas there were instances of leaders of Albanian villages barring the way and preventing the demonstrators from entering Serb villages and destroying their property. The citizens of Vushtrri/Vučitrn helped to evacuate the Ashkali when the extremists broke into their locality, destroyed and torched their newly built houses.

The destruction of religious and cultural monuments was tantamount to the devastation of the Kosovo civilisation. The wanton assault on churches and monasteries indicated the resolve of the extremists to destroy any trace of other cultures and religions.

There are reasons to believe that the transformation of demonstrations occasioned by the tragic death of three Albanian boys into violence against the Serbs, their culture and religion and the intimidation of UNMIK were organised. When representatives of local authorities tried to calm the demonstrators down, they were sometimes also targeted, as, for instance, in Kamenicë/Kamenica.

There are also reasons to believe that the silence of the representatives of various institutions and leaders of political parties on 17 March encouraged the organisers and participants in the demonstrations to step up the violence on 18 March. Even when they addressed the public and called for an end to violence, they appeared to lack sincerity and good will.

Recommendations

The judicial authorities must bring into custody those responsible for ethnic violence, both the actual perpetrators of the crimes and those who instigated, helped, directed or supported the expulsion of the Serbs and Ashkali in some other way.

The response to the hostility shown by the demonstrators towards UNMIK should be a critical re-examination of the attitude of the international administration towards the local community, including their access to international services.

An investigation should be conducted to verify the allegations and evidence that a certain number of KPS members sided with the demonstrators. Those who behaved unprofessionally and contrary to law should be removed from service. On the other hand, note needs to be taken of the fact that it was the only Kosovo institution which functioned on 17 and 18 March. It should be given a chance to grow into a service, capable of taking care of the physical safety of the members of the minorities and the protection of human dignity.

Introductory comments

Fifteen Albanians and twelve Serbs were killed during the ethnic violence in Kosovo on 17-18 March. About 170 Serbs sustained severe injuries; of them, 150 were beaten in their houses and 20 were injured in road attacks. Some 800 Serb, 90 Ashkali and two Albanian houses were either completely demolished or seriously damaged. Furthermore, 36 Orthodox religious objects were completely demolished or torched. According to the UN Secretary-General, 954 individuals were injured in March riots; of them 65 were international policemen, 58 KPS members and 61 members of the international peacekeeping force.¹

In mid-March the associations of KLA² veterans organised protests against the arrest of the commander of a branch of the Kosovo Protection Corps (KPC) Selim Krasniqi and several of his officers in Prizren.³ The organisers criticised harshly the way in which UNMIK had treated the KLA and demanded the release of the arrested KLA veterans.

On 15 March after 19:00 Jovica Ivić from Čaglavica/Çagllavicë, a Serb (18) was wounded while walking by the Prishtinë/Priština-Skopje/Shkup highway. Shortly after that, after 20:00 some 20 Serbs gathered, blocked the Prishtinë/Priština-Skopje/Shkup highway and threw stones at the vehicles of Albanians who drove along that road unaware of the barricades. KFOR and UNMIK immediately went out to the site of the attack on Jovica Ivić. They finished collecting the evidence around 02:00 but the road remained blocked. Not more than 200 people were involved in the blockade. In the morning of 16 March the Serbs blocked the road through Gračanica/Gračanicë hurling stones at Albanian vehicles but the police [UNMIK] cordoned off the area and provided a roundabout route. The UNMIK police and KFOR failed to prevail upon the Serbs to lift the block. On the other side, Albanian demonstrators blocked the road along the village of Kishnicë/Kišnica. The situation seemed to calm down in the evening of 16 March.

Three Albanian boys: Florian (9), Egzon (12) and Avni Veseli (13) from the village of Çabrë/Čabra in the Serb municipality of Zubin Potok drowned in the Ibar/Iber River in the afternoon of 16 March. The fourth boy, Fitim Veseli (11) managed to make it to the bank. The bodies of two boys were found in the river during the night. The surviving boy stated that Serbs had chased him and his three friends with dogs and that they had sought refuge in the river. All Kosovo TV stations broadcast his statement that night and the following morning, stepping up accusations against the Serbs with comments by some public figures that “something needs to be done with regard to Serb crimes”.

The first to react to the news of the three boys’ death were Albanians in the southern part of Mitrovicë/Mitrovica who rallied in protest and organised a group to attack Northern

¹ Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo, 30 April 2004.

² The Association of KLA Veterans, the Association of KLA Invalids and the Association of Families of KLA Heroes.

³ They were detained on 16 February 2004 having been indicted by the international prosecutor for war crimes and organised crime.

Mitrovica/Mitrovicë. Around 11:00 on 17 March a group of Albanians from Southern Mitrovicë/Mitrovica broke through the KFOR blockade on the bridge dividing the town and crossed into Northern Mitrovica/Mitrovicë. Around noon hundreds of Albanians gathered in Prishtinë/Priština and headed towards Čaglavica/Çagllavicë. In the centre of Prishtinë/Priština the demonstrators set on fire UNMIK and KFOR vehicles that were in their way. The demonstrators, mostly young, then began to gather in all Kosovo towns. They travelled from villages by buses brandishing national flags and slogans “UÇK, UÇK”, “Çagllavicë is not Serbia”, “Mitrovicë, we’re with you”, “UNMIK’s foisting a new war on us” and the like. As of 14:00 on 17 March almost all Serb villages and parts of towns with small groups of Serb residents were under attack. An Ashkali locality was attacked in Vushtrri/Vučitrn. In the morning of 19 March KFOR re-established control throughout Kosovo.

Several days later, on 24 March, a KPS officer and an international policeman were killed and their interpreter wounded in an ambush near Podujevë/Podujevo. Another police officer killed one of the attackers in response and the other attackers were arrested.

In his report about the investigation into the death of the three children⁴ Peter Tensley, the international prosecutor in Mitrovicë/Mitrovica, concluded that there was no evidence to support the reasonable doubt that any individual or individuals had committed the crime.

⁴ *No Evidence of Serb Responsibility*, DANAS, 28 April 2004.

1. Northern Mitrovica/Mitrovicë Attacked

Albanians started gathering in the center of southern Mitrovicë/Mitrovica at about 8 a.m. on 17 March. At 11 a.m., several hundred of them proceeded toward the main bridge connecting the southern and northern parts of the town, clashing with the international police near the Confidence Zone and easily breaking through the barriers placed some 100 meters from the UNMIK headquarters and outside the headquarters itself. At the third barrier on the bridge, they pushed against the KFOR troops, broke through and, carrying the Albanian flag, marched to the north side of the bridge. UNMIK police used tear gas and stun grenades to repel them, but the demonstrators then used the footbridge to reach the neighborhood called Three Tower Blocks, a section of northern Mitrovica/Mitrovicë inhabited mainly by Albanians.

At the main intersection about 11 o'clock, I saw women and children running from the bridge, shouting 'The Shiptars have crossed the bridge!' I rushed toward the bridge and saw on our side a group of Albanians throwing stones at vehicles and stores. I couldn't believe they were trying to take the northern part of Mitrovica. Serb men ran to the bridge, [KFOR] soldiers fired tear gas at the Albanians and pushed them back (...) A lot of men had gathered on our side, in front of the bridge. We saw the Albanians heading to the footbridge and the Three Tower Blocks. There were a lot of armored vehicles and KFOR soldiers around those buildings. The Albanians ran like mad, throwing stones at KFOR and the Serbs. They started shooting from the direction of the high-rises and from several parts of southern Mitrovica. The gunfire could be heard for several hours. After KFOR managed to turn them back and block all throughways, the Albanians and Serbs remained each on their side until late at night - the Albanians waiting for a chance to attack and the Serbs ready to defend northern Mitrovica. The Albanians from the Three Tower Blocks astounded me the most. They have lived here for years without any problems. We don't even notice them. Instead of stopping their fellow-Albanians from southern Mitrovica, they helped them. I saw them shooting from the windows of the high-rises at the Serbs and KFOR outside.

M.R. Serb, journalist from northern Mitrovica/Mitrovicë

HLC interview on 7 April 2004.

I noticed that most of the Albanians who crossed the main bridge were young. They carried stones which they threw at shops, cafes, vehicles and buildings. [KFOR] soldiers in full battle gear arrived at the bridge and fired tear gas and stun grenades at the Albanians. They managed to push them back. Then they [Albanians] began gathering behind the Cultural Center to cross over the footbridge. In the meantime, several thousand Serbs had assembled on our side and more soldiers came (...) The Albanians threw stones at them, screamed and yelled 'UÇK, UÇK.' So we started picking up stones and throwing them back at them. We would have been goners if it hadn't been for KFOR. Very soon the Albanians started shooting from all sides. We threw ourselves down on the ground, sheltering behind vehicles. A stone hit me on the head and then my friend was shot. Some people took us to the hospital. There were many injured there. I will never

forget that 17 March. We will never allow the Albanians to cross the bridge. We can't live together with them.

M.S. Serb from northern Mitrovica/Mitrovicë

HLC interview on 7 April 2004

I live in the Three Tower Blocks neighborhood. Some Serbs live there too. We use the footbridge built by KFOR when we go to southern Mitrovicë. The situation had been good lately so that we used the main bridge too. Word went around on 16 March that some children had drowned in the river because Serbs with dogs had chased them. I don't know if it's true. Anyway, the next day Albanians gathered at the southern side of the bridge to protest, and after that I saw Serbs gathering on their side of the bridge. They started throwing stones at each other. There were only a few international police so they really went at each other. Shooting was heard also. I was outside my building with about 15 men from the high-rise. We didn't stir up anything, just watched what was happening on the bridge. The Serbs saw us and came in our direction, and immediately the Albanians came over the footbridge. They didn't all get across because the French KFOR quickly blocked the bridge. The fighting started about 1 p.m., first with stones. The Serbs wanted to get into our building and we tried to stop them. KFOR members were powerless. We [Albanians] from the high-rise didn't get involved. I couldn't have any influence over the Albanians from southern Mitrovicë. Both the Albanians and the Serbs were aggressive. Fatmir Abdullahu, a young Albanian from Shipol, was hit and died on the spot. The Serbs took sniper shots at our buildings. At one point, I went inside to take a neighbor's children from the first floor higher up and, as I was climbing the stairs, a bullet came through the stairwell window. It was fired from the roof of the medical school in the northern part. There are bullet traces in the apartments too. In my opinion, the shooting came from the direction of the red buildings near the Dolce Vita Cafe. KFOR managed to calm the situation down at about 5 p.m. but there was still sporadic shooting. I heard on the news that two more Albanians, a Macedonian woman, and a Serb were also killed, and that Albanians attacked Serbs in other towns too. I think it was the most terrible event since 1999. We will all have to live with the consequences. The Orthodox church in southern Mitrovicë was burned the next day.

N.R. Albanian from Three Tower Blocks neighborhood, northern Mitrovica/Mitrovicë

HLC interview on 24 March 2004

When clashes between Albanians and Serbs started in the Three Tower Blocks area, Bosniacs from the Bošnjacka mahala neighborhood moved their women and children to southern Mitrovicë.

Serbs and Albanians live in our neighborhood too and relations are good. But when the fighting started at the Three Tower Blocks, about 100 Serbs moved toward us. We were about to leave our homes but then the Serbs turned back. Snipers began shooting at our neighborhood during the night of 17 March. Nerman Malić, a Bosniac, was hit by a sniper on 19 March, in the afternoon. He was immediately taken to hospital in Priština where he had an operation. The day before that, the Polish KFOR evacuated the Serbs from our neighborhood. We were against that but couldn't do anything about it. The

Serbs left us their keys so we could look after their homes. Nothing has gone missing from their apartments so far. I expect they will come back soon.

U.N. Bosniac from Bošnjačka mahala neighborhood, northern Mitrovica/Mitrovicë
HLC interview on 25 March 2004

1.1. Conduct of KFOR, UNMIK police and KPS

The UNMIK police clearly did not monitor developments in southern Mitrovicë/Mitrovica following reports that three Albanian boys from Çabrë/Čabra had drowned. No notice was taken of the gathering of small groups of Albanians in the evening of 16 March. Some Albanians from southern Mitrovicë/Mitrovica in UNMIK and OSCE employ warned their colleagues in the northern part of the town to stay away from work the next day, saying there would be protests in the vicinity of the bridge. The KPS must have had this information too. The fact that no warning was given to the UNMIK police and KFOR of the possibility of an attack on northern Mitrovica/Mitrovicë is the result of the attitude of the international institutions toward the KPS. The KPS does not participate in creating measures relating to security and the safety of the citizenry, including minorities, and there is no joint command or established procedure through which its members could pass on information obtained in contacts on the ground.

The UNMIK police have no authority and were evidently unable to keep the situation under control. In contrast to UNMIK, KFOR demonstrated awareness of the problems with northern Mitrovica/Mitrovicë, organized quickly and was able to stop the attempt of the Albanians from the southern part of the town to "liberate" northern Mitrovica/Mitrovicë.

1.2. Aftermath

Six people died in Mitrovica/Mitrovicë on 17 and 18 March: Fatmir Abdullahu/Fatmir Abdulahu and Ferid Çitaky/Ferid Ćitaku, both Albanians from the southern Mitrovicë/Mitrovica neighborhood of Shipol/Šipolj; Isak Ibrahimi from Shupkovac/Šupkovac village; Ajvaz Shatrolli/Ajvaz Šatroli of southern Mitrovicë/Mitrovica; Jana Tučeva, a Macedonian, and Borivoje Spasojević, a Serb from northern Mitrovica/Mitrovicë. The Kosovo media reported 11 KFOR and dozens of UNMIK police and KPS members injured.

Albanians and Serbs evacuated by KFOR on 17 March have returned to the Three Tower Blocks and Bošnjačka mahala neighborhoods. Their homes were not looted.

2. Houses in Svinjare/Frashër Burned

The Serbs of Svinjare/Frashër came under attack at about 3 p.m. on 18 March. Several hundred Albanians from southern Mitrovicë came to this Serb-Albanian village, chanting slogans in support of the KLA [UÇK], Hashim Thaqi/Hašim Taçi and Ramush Haradinaj/Ramuš Haradinaj. They immediately started torching the houses and ill-treating the Serbs fleeing the flames. Serbs in the center of the village organized an armed resistance until they were disarmed by the French contingent of KFOR and evacuated.⁵ All the Serb houses in the village were looted and burned. Albanians villagers displayed the Albanian flag on their homes, so that the demonstrators could distinguish between Albanian and Serb-owned houses. Local Albanians participated in the attack on the Serbs and the torching of their homes.



Serb house burned by Albanians; photo taken in Svinjare/Frashër © HLC

On 18 March, at about 3 o'clock in the afternoon, a large group of Albanians came toward the village from the direction of southern Mitrovica, carrying Albanian flags. KFOR didn't even try to stop them. They chanted slogans to the UÇK, Hašim Taçi, and

⁵ *Svinjare villagers: KFOR Betrayed US*, BLIC, 22 March 2004.

Ramuš Haradinaj. I was in my house in the center of the village and watched them coming closer. An Albanian flag was on a house at the end of the village. The Albanian owner knew that we would be attacked and put up the flag so that his house wouldn't be set on fire. When they reached the first Serb houses, the demonstrators started throwing stones, breaking windows and driving people out of the houses. Five or six houses were soon in flames. The UNMIK police took the people who had been driven from their homes to the center of the village, loaded the women and children into a bus and drove them to the KFOR base on a nearby hill.

D.B. Serb from Svinjare/Frashër
HLC interview on 25 April 2004

We were able to take only our IDs with us. As soon as we were out of the house, the Albanians barged in and set it on fire. They even killed our dog in the yard. An UNMIK police vehicle took us to another part of the village where a bus and KFOR were waiting. From there they drove us to the base. We had to go through the Albanian part of the village. An Albanian flag was hanging on every Albanian house and loud music could be heard. Our Albanian neighbors had started celebrating. From the KFOR base on the hill above the village we watched the Albanians looting and burning the remaining Serb houses in the village. We were taken from the base to Mitrovica and from there to Zvečan. We're still here, living in unfinished houses without water or electricity.

M.T. Serb from Svinjare/Frashër
HLC interview on 7 April 2004

The Albanians gathered in their part of the village about 3 p.m. on 18 March. They started collecting stones and went straight to the Serb houses. Some were carrying wooden poles and metal bars, and brandished them in a threatening way. My house was the first to be attacked. Several hundred Albanians, obviously enraged, started throwing stones at our house. The window panes were broken and many stones came right into the house. We were afraid to stay inside because of the possibility of having a grenade thrown in, but we were also afraid to go out because gunfire could be heard from nearby. Then a group of Albanians stormed in and forced all four of us out into the yard, punching and kicking us and hitting us with bars wherever they could. Once we had been thrown out, we could only stand and watch them climbing over one another to get inside and take our things. I have never seen anything so horrible in my life. The Albanians stole everything we had worked for for years, even things nobody could have needed. Then they threw bottles with gasoline and set the house on fire. We tried to put out the flames but the Albanians stoned us. It was then that an UNMIK vehicle came for us. On the way to the KFOR base, we saw our Albanian neighbors plundering, burning and destroying the houses in the village.

R.J. Serb from Svinjare/Frashër
HLC interview on 7 April 2004.

2.1. Conduct of KFOR and UNMIK Police

KFOR and UNMIK organized the evacuation of the Serb villagers but did not even attempt to prevent the looting and burning of their homes.

I can't believe that KFOR let them [Albanians] drive us out of the village even though their base is close by.

M.T. Serb from Svinjare/Frashër
HLC interview on 7 April 2004

I asked an UNMIK policeman to take us to the KFOR base on the hill above the village. I realized that the UNMIK police were incapable of protecting our property without KFOR. Antić and I were driven to the base in an UNMIK vehicle. A Belgian officer met with us and we pleaded with him to send troops into the village and save us from destruction. He said he could dispatch 30 soldiers from Luxembourg and 20 from Morocco to ensure our safety in the village center, but could give no guarantees for the houses on the outskirts. He refused to listen to us anymore. From the hill, we could see that the houses on the outskirts were already in flames. I pointed to the scene in front of us and he only shrugged his shoulders. So we agreed to his terms. They took us back to the village center where people had already gathered. A few Moroccan soldiers and international police were there too. As soon as we got out of the vehicle, KFOR soldiers literally forced us into trucks. We tried to explain that we didn't want to leave our houses and that we were prepared to defend them with our lives. But we were manhandled into the trucks and taken to the KFOR base on the hill. On the way there, we saw the Albanians shooting off their guns, singing songs about the UÇK, looting and torching our homes as the KFOR soldiers stood by and calmly watched what was going on. KFOR and UNMIK are directly responsible for what happened in our village. They let the Albanians destroy Svinjare even though they could have defended it if they had wanted to.

D.B. Serb from Svinjare/Frashër
HLC interview on 25 April 2004

2.2. Aftermath

All 200 Serbs villagers were expelled from Svinjare/Frashër. The relevant Albanian bodies have come out with damage estimates which, according to the Serb villagers, do not reflect the real value of the property destroyed. The reconstruction of 30 houses out of the 134 burned down on 18 March started on 1 June.⁶

⁶ *Serbs Do Not Believe Empty Promises*, VEČERNJE NOVOSTI, 2 June 2004.

3. Roads Blocked and Clashes in Čaglavica/Çagllavicë

Jovica Ivić, an 18-year-old Serb, was shot several times and severely wounded by unknown gunmen on 15 March in Čaglavica/Çagllavicë. In protest, Serbs blocked the Prishtinë/Prištine-Skopje/Shkup and Prishtinë/Priština-Gjilan/Gnjilane roads. Anyone who tried to get through was mistreated and stoned. The roads were blocked until the early afternoon of 17 March. Provoked by this reaction of the Čaglavica/Çagllavicë Serbs, angered by the news of the drowning of the three boys at Čabra/Çabrë, and demonstrating their support for Albanians in southern Mitrovicë/Mitrovica, participants in the Prishtinë/Priština demonstrations, among whom many young people, proceeded to Čaglavica/Çagllavicë.⁷

Serb women and children hid in the houses while a group of men organized defenses in the center of the village and another went to meet the Albanians. KFOR, the UNMIK police and the KPS formed a cordon at the entrance to the village but were swept aside by the Albanian mass who immediately started setting fire to Serb houses in that part of the village. Two Serbs were wounded: Nenad Djokić by fire from an automatic weapon and Milorad Lekić by a sniper. Three Albanians were killed in the clash with KFOR and the Serbs: Bujar and Kastriot Elshani/Eljšani from Bajicë/Banjica village one who was not named.⁸ Twelve Serb and two Albanian houses were burned. A number of the 1,200 Serbs who live in Čaglavica/Çagllavicë left the village during the clashes.

A young Serb was wounded on 15 March. That's why Serbs from Çagllavicë and surrounding villages blocked the Prishtinë-Skopje and Prishtinë-Gjilan road (...) On 16 March, they had a boy on the news who testified how he and another three boys were chased by Serbs with dogs and three of them drowned in the Iber River at Çabrë village. The next morning, all the TV stations were reporting the events in Mitrovicë, saying that several people had been killed and more than 500 injured. I can't say that it didn't upset me. I left my apartment at soon after noon that day and saw the taxi drivers putting up a road block (...) A group of about 70 people, mainly middle-aged, started out on foot from Prishtinë to Çagllavicë. It was odd - there was no shouting, no calling on others to join them. They just walked in silence. I went after them (...) We walked to the intersection where the road to Gjilan branches off. There was a strong cordon a little farther off. We approached the cordon and waited. More people arrived from Prishtinë, mostly young. The police [KPS] told us to go back to Prishtinë. Some people started insulting and even threatening them. There was some pushing and shoving but the police didn't let us get through (...) Half an hour later, there was a big crowd there. Some of the young ones went to some empty land on the left of the road and tried to get around the cordon. But the police extended and cordon and, by doing that, made it weaker. The cordon was broken through and I saw small groups of people running toward Çagllavicë (...) I saw

⁷ *Collapse in Kosovo*, International Crisis Group report, 22 April 2004: "Teachers in the Albanian village Ajvali/Ajvalija near Čaglavica/Çagllavicë let the children out of school to go to Čaglavica/Çagllavicë."

⁸ *16 Dead and 575 Injured in Unrest Around Kosovo*, KOHA DITORE, 18 March 2004.

two KFOR vehicles from which tear gas was being fired. The people stoned the vehicles. About 3 p.m, I saw a house behind the hotel burning and then smoke rose above the other houses. It was then that we heard gunfire (...) I decided to go back to Prishtinë because I didn't agree with what was going on. I was angry at the blocking of the road but that wasn't and couldn't be a reason to burn the Serb houses (...) When I got back to Prishtinë, I saw two burning UNMIK vehicles on the traffic circle. I heard later that three young Albanians were killed in Čagllavicë. Two were brothers from Bajice and I think the third was from Prishtinë.

N.N. Albanian from Prishtinë/Priština, participant in demonstrations
HLC interview on 18 April 2004



Serb house burned by Albanians; photo taken in Čagllavica/Çagllavicë © HLC

The road was blocked until 17 March (...) That day, Albanians from Priština started out for Čagllavica. KFOR, UNMIK and the KPS set up a cordon at Veternik. Younger men from our village were on the main road, and the women and children in the houses. There are several houses at the end of our village in the direction of Priština, some of which are Albanian. It's curious that none of those Albanians were seen that day. Maybe they fled earlier. A large crowd of Albanians came up to the cordon in the early afternoon. The cordon was gradually extended because a mass of Albanians started crossing the fields to get to our village. That's how the cordon was broken through, and our young men pulled back slowly. When the Albanians started setting fire to our houses, we withdrew to the

center of the village. We weren't able to take any belongings with us - everything burned together with the houses. Milorad Lekić was hit in the shoulder by a sniper in front of his house in the center. It is said that the sharpshooter was in the Albanian motel at the beginning of our village. Nenad Djokić got a bullet in the leg. Another Serb was also wounded but I don't know his name.

M.M. Serb from Čaglavica/Çagllavicë
HLC interview on 2 June 2004

3.1. Conduct of KFOR, UNMIK Police and KPS

KFOR, the UNMIK police and the KPS were unable to prevent the first wave of Albanian demonstrators from entering the village. Upon the arrival of US troops, KFOR managed to establish control and prevent even more destruction of Serb houses and other property. The Serbs have no objections with regard to the actions of the international forces and KPS. KFOR and UNMIK police used live ammunition in the clashes with Albanian demonstrators. In the evening of 17 March, KFOR had the situation in the village completely under control and there were no more incidents.

KFOR, the UNMIK police and the KPS were scared. They tried to rein in the Albanians but couldn't do it because there were so many demonstrators. It seemed to me that they were caught with their pants down. When the Albanians broke through the cordon, the KPS and KFOR lost control and the Albanians got into the village (...) About 11 at night, a unit of the US contingent of KFOR arrived and put up a strong checkpoint on Veternik Hill. They didn't let any more Albanians into the village. I know there were attempts on 18 March too, but nobody could get into the village anymore. That's why we didn't have any more trouble after 17 March.

M.M. Serb from Čaglavica/Çagllavicë
HLC interview on 2 June 2004

Six KFOR tanks were parked in the middle, two abreast. There were soldiers in and on them. I think they were Finns. UNMIK police and KPS members formed a cordon (...) I saw three young men break through and run toward Çagllavicë. The international police let loose a dog after them. The dog caught one of them by his pant leg. Then an international policeman grabbed the young man. Immediately, the other two came up to them with big stones in their hands. I don't know what they said but I saw them make like they were going to hit the policeman. The policeman let the young man go and all three of them went into Çagllavicë.

N.N. Albanian from Prishtinë/Priština
HLC interview on 18 April 2004

3.2. Aftermath

The Serbs whose homes were burned down are now in refugee centers in Gračanica/Gračanicë or are staying with relatives in Serb villages. They rebuke their Albanian neighbors for failing to help them to protect their property, especially since relations between the two communities were good. There were some attacks by Serbs on Albanian villagers. Calm has been restored in the village and Albanians come to Čaglavica/Çagllavicë to trade with the Serbs.

People whose houses were burned were first put up in the refugee center in Gračanica and are now staying with relatives or renting. Some Serb houses in that part of the village weren't torched and Serbs live in them without any problems. We were on good terms with the Albanians before and after what happened but they didn't want to or didn't dare to protect our property on 17 March. Bahtija, an Albanian who lives here in the village, was having coffee at the house of his Serb neighbor on 17 March. A big crowd of young men from the village came to the house and threw stones at it. They wanted to set it on fire. But Bahtija's son came out with a pistol and fired it into the air. The mob pulled back. An Albanian owns a big warehouse next to the road to Laplje Selo. Serbs broke in, smashed all the windows and stole all the goods. I know that for a fact but I think those Serbs were from Laplje Selo. The situation here is good now. There are Albanians who come to the village to trade and we haven't had a single incident. People are still bitter but they know that violence isn't the solution. The committee evaluating the damage has been and, so far as I know, work on reconstruction of the burnt houses is to start soon.

M.M. Serb from Čaglavica/Çagllavicë
HLC interview on 2 June 2004

4. Serbs in Prishtinë/Priština Under Attack

The first groups of demonstrators started gathering in front of buildings in which Serbs reside at about 6 p.m., and were soon joined by those returning from Čaglavica/Çagllavicë. The Albanians shot at the buildings with firearms, and threw stones, bottles filled with gasoline, firecrackers and grenades at them. Serbs from the lower floors moved farther up. At 10 p.m., the demonstrators stormed into the buildings and began setting fire to the ground floor apartments. The small number of UNMIK and Kosovo police present either watched what was taking place without taking any action to prevent it, or actively helped the demonstrators to start fires. The demonstrators looted the empty apartments without hindrance. Albanians living in nearby buildings saw how the apartments were robbed: one group would enter and pack valuables and other belongings into bags while another waited in the street to take the bags away. Serbs recognized some of their Albanian neighbors among the assailants. When other Albanians, neighbors and friends, offered to help, the Serbs were distrustful and turned them down.

Dragan Smiljanić was attacked and suffered a serious stab wound as he was being evacuated. KFOR was forced to use firearms in order to carry out the evacuation of the Serbs. A stray bullet hit an Albanian woman who lives on the ground floor of one of the YU Program apartment buildings. A Romanian UNMIK policewoman was slightly injured. The last group of 33 Serbs was evacuated at 2 a.m. with the help of a US police patrol. Agron Ramadani, an Albanian, was killed during the demonstrations in Prishtinë/Priština. The next day, 18 March, the Orthodox church of St Nicholas in the center of the city was burned down.



YU Program buildings and Serb cars burned by Albanians; photo taken in Prishtinë/Priština © HLC

I live in one of the YU Program buildings. At about 9 p.m., some friends called me on the phone to come out with them to see what was going on. We went to the traffic circle on the outskirts of the city, on the road to Skopje. We saw two burning UN vehicles. There were a lot of people coming back on foot from Cagllavice. There were a few policemen near by. We went back home (...) I was climbing the stairs when I heard a sound like a firecracker. My friends called and told me to switch off the lights and stay indoors because a young man had been killed in the street. It was a quarter to eleven when I heard loud noises. People were throwing stones at the Serb buildings. Then I saw flames and heard a grenade blast (...) I saw them throw three or four gasoline bombs at the buildings. The fire spread to the fourth floor. I was scared that my building would be

targeted too so I went out and stayed for about half an hour. On my way back, when I was near the front of my building, I saw that they were still throwing stones and gasoline bombs at the YU Program buildings. Some guys were throwing things at a big UN vehicle going round in circles on the main road. By that time, there were many more people in the streets and not all of them were young anymore (...) I saw small groups of four or five people going into apartments in the YU Program buildings. They ransacked the apartments and filled black bags with stuff and lowered them to the ground with ropes. Others took the bags and ran off with them. This went on until 1 a.m. There were people on the fifth floor of a building in which apartments were on fire. Some cars were burned on the parking lot outside that building. A big group of UNMIK police came from the left (...) I saw people running off as the police fired tear gas and something that made sparks on the ground.

N.N. Albanian from Prishtinë/Priština
HLC interview on 23 March 2004

A week before these events, I was on my way home when I noticed a KPS patrol on guard in front of our building. I asked them what they were doing there and they said it was for our security. I found that suspicious because the UNMIK police and the KPS had stopped guarding our buildings some months before (...) Our building was attacked three times on 17 March. The last one was the worst. It started at about 10 p.m. The Albanians, including our neighbors from nearby buildings, fired guns at our building. KFOR had evacuated Serbs from the other entrances earlier. They broke our windows and threw gasoline bombs inside. That's how they started a fire in a first-floor apartment. The residents on our side of the building went up to a fifth-floor apartment, which had a strong metal door with bars. There were 33 of us inside, with several children (...) The smoke from the first floor started rising and we began choking. I thought to myself that I would throw myself off the terrace if they came in. My five-year-old son was with me and I was afraid for him (...) The evacuation of people from our entrance lasted several hours. The worst bit was running from the entrance to the KFOR transporters. That's where my son went missing. They shot at us several times. A Romanian woman with the international police pushed me down on the ground next to a car and lay on top of me. I noticed that my son was missing when they bundled me into the transporter. I climbed out quickly and started looking for him. All the Serbs refused to leave until my son was found and they started getting out of the transporter too. We found him in one of the KFOR vehicles.

V.B. Serb from Prishtinë/Priština, YU Program buildings
HLC interview on 30 March 2004

It was my wife who noticed a fire on our balcony. I put it out quickly. My next-door neighbors, Albanians, offered to help but I refused.

D.R. Serb from Prishtinë/Priština, YU Program buildings
HLC interview on 8 May 2004

From my balcony, I saw a young man I know - Agron the barber. He threw a gasoline bomb onto our balcony. He was wearing a pink T-shirt. I also recognized Bekim, who is

our neighbor too. It was exactly 7.45 p.m. when they threw a gasoline bomb at me and called me 'Shkina'.⁹

Lj.R. Serb from Prishtinë/Priština, YU Program buildings
HLC interview on 8 May 2004

4.1. Conduct of KFOR, UNMIK Police and KPS

Some KPS members were supportive of the demonstrators. According to Serb statements, the Kosovo policemen helped demonstrators to enter the buildings, and several used their cigarette lighters to light the wicks of gasoline bombs, which were then thrown at the YU Program buildings. KFOR evacuated the Serb residents but took no action to prevent the torching of the church of St Nicholas on 18 March, merely evacuating the priest.

When I noticed a group of people moving toward our building at about 6.30 p.m., I asked the KPS for help. They assured me that everything was under control and said there was no reason to be afraid, but that I should not leave my apartment. After hearing that a gasoline bomb had been thrown into entrance number 23, I called the KPS again, but they only repeated that everything was under control. Soon after that, there were noises outside the building - curses, stones, poles and anything else the demonstrators could lay their hands on. I saw the Kosovo policemen [Albanian] standing in the same line as the demonstrators. I expected the police to protect us. But my impression was that they were watching us, to see that we wouldn't by any chance put up a resistance. I noticed snipers when we were being evacuated. I think they were from the KPS. They did nothing but hide. They didn't even try to protect us.

D.S. Serb from Prishtinë/Priština, YU Program buildings
HLC interview on 8 May 2004.

When a bunch of boys of around 15 tried to get into our entrance, the KPS stopped them. But later, when the number of demonstrators had increased, the KPS let them break in. They didn't give us any protection. KFOR evacuated us at the last minute, when Dragan Smiljanić was wounded.

Lj.S. Serb from Prishtinë/Priština, YU Program buildings
HLC interview on 8 May 2004.

I was on duty that night. The KPS set my car on fire. Then they broke into my apartment and stole my uniform. When I found some of the things stolen from me at Police Station No. 4, I demanded to be told who exactly had stolen my uniform. I never got an answer. I can't say that all Albanians in the KPS were involved in the March riots, but the majority certainly were. I told them that.

Serb from Prishtinë/Priština, KPS member
HLC interview on 8 May 2004

⁹ Derogatory for Serb in Albanian.

I called the police a number of times but they told me their units were out in the area. However, they only helped the violence. I saw a policeman light the wick of a gasoline bomb with his lighter and give it to a demonstrator who then threw it at our building. I called an Albanian friend who works at the US Office and told them we were done for. He said he would come with members of the US contingent of KFOR. They arrived at the last minute and evacuated us.

V.B. Serb from Prishtinë/Priština, YU Program buildings
HLC interview on 30 March 2004

I sought help from the KPS patrol that was outside my entrance at the time. They took my statement and promised that reinforcements would soon arrive. But I didn't see any bigger number of police until we were evacuated. After talking with me, the KPS went to Alija's [Albanian] shop in one of the YU Program buildings. I think that's when the KPS began to liaise for the demonstrators.

D.R. Serb from Prishtinë/Priština, YU Program buildings
HLC interview on 8 May 2004

4.2. Aftermath

All Serb residents of the YU Program buildings were displaced. On 27 March, the Kosovo government announced the start of the reconstruction of the destroyed apartments. Prime Minister Bajram Rexhepi/Bajram Redžepi formally opened the works. The committee assessing the damage found that 20 apartments had been completely destroyed and 50 damaged. The first residents who returned on 27 April complained about the substandard work, and the committee ordered repairs to be made.

Our apartments were completely destroyed, not only those in which Serbs lived but also the apartments of UNMIK employees and international police. They fired shots at the door of a Romanian woman who works for the international police. Luckily, my apartment wasn't set on fire but it was ransacked and my belongings stolen. When I went to see what state it was in, I found pictures of my child cut up and a knife stuck in the easy chair.

V.B. Serb from Prishtinë/Priština, YU Program buildings
HLC interview on 30 March 2004

5. Public Buildings and Houses Destroyed, Serbs Beaten in Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje

To demonstrate their support to Albanians in southern Mitrovicë/Mitrovica, a group of Albanians prevented the scheduled 2 p.m. departure of a train from the Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje station. Soon after that, the demonstrators starting torching buildings housing Serb parallel institutions - the Health Center, Town Hall, post office -

on the outskirts of the town in Bresje village. The Sveti Sava school was the next to be set on fire. Serbs maintain that firefighters arrived on the scene but took no action to contain the blaze, reacting only if there was a danger of the conflagration spreading to Albanian-owned houses. Serbs also say that the Albanians brought up a gasoline tank truck and sprayed the fuel over the Health Center, Town Hall, Post office and Serb houses in the vicinity. The damage assessment committee announced that 106 Serbs houses and outbuildings were burned, as well as the Orthodox churches of St Nicholas and St Catherine. Some Albanians tried unsuccessfully to protect the property of their Serb neighbors. Eyewitnesses and, in particular, victims, underline the inhumane treatment meted out by Albanians toward Serbs they found still in their homes or in the streets.

A column of about 3,000 young Albanians blocked the road from Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje to Bresje, with the KPS providing security for them. According to Serbs quoted by the Belgrade daily *Danas*, a KPS member by the first name Iso from Dubrave e Epërme/Gornja Dubrava led the demonstrators when they started throwing stones and gasoline bombs at the Health Center in which there were close to 40 Serb staff and 20 patients. Five to ten minutes later, a fire truck arrived but the demonstrators prevented the firefighters from tackling the blaze. The Serbs also saw a tanker truck which, they said, was full of gasoline with which the demonstrators doused buildings before setting them alight. After the Health Center, they torched Serb-owned houses and a store on the opposite side of the street, and continued to the Sveti Sava School, setting fire to it and the surrounding Serb houses. Trifun Stojilović was severely beaten and Zlatibor Trajković was killed by the demonstrators. On Thursday, 18 March, two more Serb houses were burned, followed by another 20 during the night. St Nicholas' church was set on fire that same day, and Predrag Jovanović was badly beaten.¹⁰

There were no signs that anything like this would happen. I often took walks through Kosovo Polje in the evenings. I had Albanian friends (...) About 106 houses in Kosovo Polje were burned. On the first day, when the demonstrations started, they torched the hospital, Sveta Sava School and the post office, and then the Živin Gaj restaurant and all the houses near the school. There was a mob of over 5,000 people by about 3 p.m. I couldn't recognize any of them because they were wearing dark glasses and had their faces covered with scarves. They shouted all kinds of slogans. There was also a gasoline tanker. They threw gasoline bombs into the Živin Gaj restaurant owned by my uncle. We tried to put out the fire but couldn't (...) Trifun Stojilović was beaten up that day. He used to be a policeman and is an old man now. They threw him down on the ground and kicked him. He was bloody all over. KPS policemen stood and watched them beating him and did nothing to protect him. We heard later that Zlatibor Trajković was burned alive in his house (...) More than 50 of them started tearing down our fence and throwing gasoline bombs. We were all in my yard. They cut our water. The police told us we had five minutes to get out of the yard. I had to cut through the fence wires so that we could get to our cars and escape the mob. There were about 25 or 26 members of our family

¹⁰ *Testimonies on Tragic Days*, DANAS, 30 march 2004.

altogether. It didn't occur to me to stay and defend the house. All I wanted was to stay alive. My house was intact when we left. But it was burned on the night of 17/18 March, after being doused with gasoline. Everything inside burned. They took some things of value, technical goods mainly, and all the rest burned. Even the outside toilet was set on fire. They took my prize chickens from the yard.

D.V. Serb from Bresje
HLC interview on 28 March 2004.

I've lived all my life in Bresje where I ran the Živin Gaj restaurant. My whole family worked there, it was our livelihood (...) The restaurant was open on 17 March. At about 3 p.m. we heard noises from the direction of Kosovo Polje. A mass of Albanians was coming toward us on the main road. I closed the restaurant and went upstairs with the rest of the family, thinking that they would only continue along the road. But they started throwing stones at my house and then set fire to the kiosk I had outside the restaurant. Grujica Simić's car was parked in front and they set it alight (...) Then they banged up the cafe with stones and missiles. After a time, we went for refuge to my nephew Dojčin's house, which is behind mine. The demonstrators started throwing gasoline bombs into the restaurant. My son and I used the back door to get into the restaurant and we tried to put out the gasoline bombs (...) Dojčin had to cut the fence for us to get out. We drove onto a side street and on to the center of Bresje. This was between 4 and 5 p.m. I heard later that they threw gasoline bombs into the second story that evening, so that the whole house and everything in it burned down. I can't set a value on all my belongings but I can say that I had good stuff and equipment in my restaurant. I had computers and other valuable things, and 10,000 Euros. My son-in-law had 2,000 Euros. We also had some cash in dinars, to the value of about 500 Euros. I had 16 tables and 60 chairs. My wife's gold jewelry burned. I didn't notice that any belongings were taken - they all burned together with the house.

M.V. Serb from Bresje
HLC interview on 1 April 2004.

I was born in Vranje and came to Kosovo Polje more than 20 years ago to work as a policeman. Everyone in Kosovo Polje and its surroundings knew me. I am retired now. I heard on 17 March that Albanians were staging demonstrations in the town. My son was at his apartment in the town center at the time. I went to get him but found that he wasn't there (...) I made my way back home, using the back streets. Dojčin and some other Serbs were in their yard and tried to make me stay with them. But I kept thinking about my son and not knowing where he was. When I got to the Bondsteel Cafe, I saw a group of people coming from the Health Center. I would say there were about 100 of them. One of them said to me: 'Ku po shkon ti shkia' which means 'Where do you think you're going, Serb?' He punched me in the head. I fell down and covered my head with my hands. I don't remember anything else, what they used to hit me or how many of them there were. When I came to, they were gone. I hurt all over, and my left eye was swollen shut. Then I saw a mob on the road some 30 to 40 meters from me. Two policemen [KPS] were trying to stop them from going to the Serb houses. I headed away slowly, climbing over wire fences around Serb yards. Then my son, who had returned home in the meantime, came

(...) An international policeman came along, a German I think. My son drove me in his car, and the policeman followed us in his police car. We went to Laplje Selo. Though I was covered in blood, I hadn't realized that I had been stabbed. It was only when I was taken to hospital in Gračanica that I and the doctor saw the stab wounds - one under the rib, the second in the right hip, and another two slighter ones, also on the right side. I had injuries on both legs and on the head (...) I was transferred to Belgrade for treatment later on. I found out what had happened only when I came back home. The apartments of my son and another four Serb families in the Lepa Brena building were looted. At the Gračanica hospital, I saw Jovo Ćirković from Kuzmin. He had a piece of shrapnel in his left leg. I also saw Doca Radivojević - he had been shot in the right hip and the bullet was still in him. I saw Stana Maksimović. She had been beaten up. I also saw Stana Kalesić. They burned her hands and arms with cigarettes. Zlatko Trajković was burned alive. Stana Aleksić and her daughter Gordana were both beaten up.

T.S. Serb from Bresje
HLC interview on 28 April 2004



Serb house burned by Albanians; photo taken in Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje © HLC

The Health Center and school in Bresje were set on fire at about 1.30 p.m. on 17 March. My house is about one kilometer from both these buildings, right behind the traffic police. Soon after my daughter Nena came home from work that afternoon, an Albanian woman

called her on the phone and said the situation was very bad. A group of about a dozen Albanians attacked our house about 5.30. None of them was older than 18. After first beating up our neighbor Žika Tomić, they started shooting and breaking everything. I went into the yard to get my grandson Jovan. He scrambled into the house and they hit me with some planks they found in the yard. My arm started to bleed. Then about 15 policemen came (...) They made a human shield so that we could get out of the house. As the police took us away, I saw that the group had gotten bigger. They drove us to the police station and put us in the conference room. They asked my daughter to go with them to collect Serbs from their homes. That took all night. There were 138 of us in all, of whom 13 children (...) Many arrived all beaten up. Žika Tomić was covered in blood. Jova Ćirković had been beaten. Čeda Ropar's wife had had her arm broken. Albanian doctors came to give us first aid. Jova Ćirković was taken to hospital and the old woman's arm was bandaged up. They didn't have any medicine. The next morning, we were driven to the Red Cross.

D.S. Serb from Bresje, displaced to Ugljare/Uglare
HLC interview on 26 April 2004

I worked as a car body repairman for 35 years. I lived in Germany. I wanted to provide for my children. I never even had a cup of coffee in a cafe. I never took my wife out. All I wanted was to save up. I had a three-story house. I have nothing now, and nor do my children. I used to get several thousand marks from renting out part of the house to foreigners and from my work. Albanians often came to me at night, in secret, so I could fix their machines. They all knew me as a honest man. I didn't allow the burning of Albanian houses in my street during the war. The owners were all honest people, just like me. It's the politicians who are to blame for everything that's happening to us. There are good people and bad people everywhere (...) Thirty-seven and a half thousand Euros went up in flames in my house. When it started to burn, my three daughters, wife and granddaughter began screaming. I grabbed my granddaughter and ran outside with her. Never mind the money. What would I do without my granddaughter? When we were outside, I had to put my hand over my granddaughter's mouth so that she wouldn't give us away with her crying (...) We had to hide as if we were beasts. We fled to the Albanian alleys, hid in the dark so they wouldn't get us. Somewhere around 11.30 p.m. I saw an Albanian who works as an interpreter for the OSCE and asked him to take my daughters and granddaughter to safety. He agreed and drove them to Ugljare. I stayed, hiding in the alleys. When a group of Albanians came to our house and started to set it on fire, I hid in the cesspool. I heard two of my Albanian neighbors telling them I was a good man, that I never did anybody any harm, but it was no use. An Albanian who works at the mosque came and drove the two of them away. Then they set fire to the house. They had a bottle of gasoline. I had some money stashed in the furnace, savings from the rent paid to me by international police. Whether they found it or it burned I don't know. All I know is that I don't have a set of clean underwear to change into today. I've lost my soul. They took my soul. They attacked us as if we were beasts. If we aren't human, then someone should come out and say so and we would then leave.

M.I. Serb from Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje, displaced to Ugljare/Uglare
HLC interview on 26 April 2004

5.1. Conduct of KFOR, UNMIK Police, KPS and KPC

The Kosovo police evacuated the Serbs while the only concern of the international police was to move their own families to safety. The Kosovo police merely watched the violence being perpetrated by Albanians. There are statements that some Kosovo police led the demonstrators but also that others helped the Serbs. Several Serbs who rented apartments to members of the international police say these flatly refused to drive them to safety to nearby Serb villages. According to some statements, KPC members took part in the demonstrations.

There was no KFOR and the KPS was on the opposite side, at the gas station, about 200 meters from the Serb houses. I heard one Kosovo policeman say the restaurant [Živin Gaj] had to burn. KPS police watched them beat up Trifun Stojilović and did nothing. Some KPS police even marched with the demonstrators.

D.V. Serb from Bresje

HLC interview on 28 March 2004

My daughter called KFOR and they informed the KPS (...) Three KPS policemen arrived very soon and pushed us into the house. They asked who had hit me. I pointed to two of them and the police locked them in their car. Then 15 police, including a woman they called Sada, came. The mob rocked the police car as if they wanted to overturn it, and the police let the two go. The police told us we had five minutes to leave the house. They made a human shield for us to come out. They didn't let us take any of our belongings though Sada helped me get the bag with our papers and documents. I didn't even have time to put on my shoes. When the police led us out of the house, I saw that the mob had grown (...) They drove us to the police station and put us in the conference room.

D.S. Serb from Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje, displaced to Ugljare/Uglare

HLC interview on 26 April 2004

I can tell you that the Kosovo police led them [the demonstrators]. We haven't trusted them for a long time. Albanians once attacked me with a screwdriver. See, I still have the scar [shows the HLC field researcher a conspicuous scar between his left nostril and eye]. I went to the police. No one asked what had happened to me. They only wanted me to tell them my height, weight, the color of my eyes. Since then, no one in Kosovo Polje has gone to the police because we realized that they would never help us. This was clear also in March. My middle daughter called the KPS in the morning of 18 March and asked them to protect us because some houses had already been set on fire. The policeman said to her: 'Kid, if your house wasn't burned yesterday, it will be today.'

M.I. Serb from Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje, displaced to Ugljare/Uglare

HLC interview on 26 April 2004

I begged the international policeman to let us four old women into his car and save us. He took his wife and child and left us. We hid in the pigsties. There was a crowd of young men in front of us, throwing stones. Two KPS policemen came for us about 10.30 p.m.

They had been informed from Belgrade that four old women were hiding in the alleys. They took us to the police station.

S.R. Serb from Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje, displaced to Ugljare/Uglare
HLC interview on 26 April 2004

5.2. Aftermath

Serbs are dissatisfied with the damage estimates since between 15,000 to 20,000 Euros has been earmarked for houses they believe are worth around 100,000 Euros.¹¹ Displaced to Ugljare/Uglare village to which the Serb municipal offices were moved after the March events, the Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje Serbs expected their co-citizens to demonstrate more solidarity with them. They also expected the Serbian state to ensure regular deliveries of humanitarian aid, as repeatedly announced by politicians. Large families are staying in container homes, sleeping on the floor, and without stoves on which they could cook their meals. Nor are there facilities in which they could properly launder their clothes. Since the March events, they have been receiving monthly financial assistance of 65 Euros per family from the Serbian government.

I want my house to be repaired and compensation for everything that was damaged. I don't know if I'll stay. I have two daughters and don't know if it's safe for them here. I want to stay, this is the land of my ancestors. It's hard for me, and hard for my Albanian friends. Some called me afterwards and wept.

D.V. Serb from Bresje
HLC interview on 28 March 2004

We're staying in the Serb village of Ugljare. A few days after we came 10 container homes arrived. We heard they were sent by the Coordination Center. Our family was allotted one of them. We have two beds and a foam rubber mattress. We were also given some flour but we don't have a stove. Our house was burned down completely. We want our house to be rebuilt and our safety to be ensured.

D.S. Serb from Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje, displaced to Ugljare/Uglare
HLC interview on 26 April 2004

In the Lepa Brena building, an Albanian gave his own metal door to the KPS to replace the door of a Serb neighbor's apartment which had been broken down on 17 March. Two young Albanian women tried to stop the attackers from setting fire to the ground-floor apartments. From their windows, they shouted at them to leave the apartments alone. The hooligans shouted insults back at them. Two other neighbors, Bedrija Trnava and Ganija Krasniçi, also tried to stop the burning.

R.T. Serb from Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje,
HLC interview on 26 April 2004

¹¹ *Reconstruction of All Buildings in the Course of This Year*, DANAS, 24 May 2004

My name is M.I. I live in a container. I am a man without an address (...) Look, this is the welfare I got from Serbia. Exactly 5,031 dinars [65 euro]. What can I do with that? I'm sorry, I had a lot of things to say inside [at the conference] but my throat seized up. How is it possible that no one from the Serbian government came? Or anyone from the Kosovo government? My God, 106 houses were burned down in Kosovo Polje and no one came to see us. Off you go, you animal, when no one sees you. The messages from Serbia are always, 'Stay, don't sell up!' D'you know how many people have been driven from their homes? I don't know the exact number either, but I know that none of the households had less than two members. Mine numbered six (...) Believe me, I'm an honest man. I came here [to the conference] because I had to speak out about our troubles; I would never have come otherwise (...) We fled Kosovo Polje to Ugljare. When we got here, nobody asked us anything. They started organizing things, lecturing us, holding rallies. We protested and asked to be heard. They said accommodation would be provided for us soon and that we should stay. We wanted to go to Serbia. Then they started insulting us. Pardon me, sir but I'll be direct: 'Let's organize transportation for the cunts.' I said to them: 'Shame on you. With what right are you disposing with the aid sent by the Coordination Center? Why didn't you give us the sheds nobody needs. We could fix them up and make them habitable and live like human beings, not like livestock in containers.' They still haven't given us the sheds. Right next to our container is an ice-cream stall. My granddaughter asks for one and I don't have the money for it. Even the clothes on my back aren't mine; they were given to me by an Italian KFOR soldier. I have another pair of pants, jeans, but I keep those for special occasions. Thank you, but I can't take it [HLC researcher wishes to buy a chocolate bar for the witness's granddaughter but is told not to]. Please don't insult me. All I have left is my pride. I am a poor man now, but I wasn't always. I feel bad because I am forced to accept humanitarian aid. Believe me, I take it only for my granddaughter's sake. As for me, I couldn't care less if I dropped dead. The shelf life of the cans of food ran out a long time ago. I have heard that all the aid sent by the Coordination Center arrives in Leposavić and then goes to the stores. So people have to buy what they should be receiving as humanitarian aid. All we get is the expired stuff because it can't be sold. A cash payment from the Coordination Center should have arrived for my granddaughter. There was to be a donation to every child. After distribution, it turned out that every child was to get 400 Euros. Time went by but my granddaughter didn't get her money. I went to see why not and they told me that everybody who applied had received their money. I did hand in an application for my granddaughter but... The only property of any value that I still have is this camera, which is worth 660 Euros. But its battery has run down and I can't recharge it because the attachment plug was burned together with the house. So I can't sell even that now. I had lent the camera to a relative of mine and he gave it back a short while ago (...) I'm 55 and look at least 10 years older. My wife says we ought to leave, but I'm still hoping. I keep thinking that they will tell us something, but nobody is saying anything. I am still hoping for my granddaughter's sake. I honestly don't care a damn for myself. [Witness weeps.]

M.I. Serb from Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje, displaced to Ugljare/Uglare
HLC interview on 26 April 2004

6. Violence by youth in Obiliq/Obilić

Up to the March events, 450 Serbs lived in the town, mainly in the Todorovići neighborhood and the YU Program buildings. The protests started at noon on 17 March outside the Obiliq/Obilić Town Hall. Most of the demonstrators were school children, who were somewhat later joined by adults. The Town Hall was stoned. Some Albanian municipal employees joined in the demonstration. The next day, 18 March, the demonstrations started with a march by elementary and secondary school students. Serb houses in Todorovići and apartments in the YU Program buildings were torched that day.

I was at work on 17 March. There were several other Serbs besides me who worked in the municipal offices. We heard that there would be demonstrations in town. That wasn't unusual in Obilić so we didn't pay much attention. However, something odd happened in the Town Hall. While demonstrators were gathering outside, mainly secondary school children, the fire alarm went off in the building. We took that to mean that the Albanian employees had joined the demonstrations. I don't know how else to explain it. The demonstrations were led by kids but they were joined later by adults.

S.A. Serb from Babin Most/Babimoc, Head of Communities Office, Obiliq/Obilić
HLC interview on 19 April 2004

I was at the offices of a non-governmental organization in the Town Hall building on 17 March. The demonstrations outside the Town Hall started at about noon. The demonstrators shouted and threw stones, and the Albanians who work in the municipal offices cheered them on. When KFOR arrived, they were pelted with stones. Some other Serbs who work in the building were with me (...) We managed to get out at about 4 o'clock when the demonstrators had gone in the direction of Plemetina village. Musa Mekići came into the office just before that and said we could go as the demonstrators had gone elsewhere. He even went to get one of the women's bag. It was quiet in the evening.

S.D. Serb from Obiliq/Obilić, women's rights activist
HLC interview on 27 March 2004

6.1. Serbs Beaten at Railway Station

At about 2.30 p.m. on 17 March, the demonstrators marched to the railway station where they physically assaulted 16 elderly Serbs who were waiting for the train. Some suffered serious injuries, others escaped unscathed.

It was around 2.20 p.m. when the mob went to the railway station where they found 16 elderly Serbs who were waiting for the train. They beat them up. They broke the collar bone of the 90-year-old Stojana Dimitrijević. One old man, also Dimitrijević whose first

name I don't know, was also beaten up. Another old woman, Ristić, I don't know her first name either, was cut about the throat with something sharp. One woman had her ribs broken, and the others suffered lighter injuries.

S.A. Serb from Babin Most/Babimoc, Head of Communities Office, Obiliq/Obilić

HLC interview on 19 April 2004

My father, who lives next door to me in the Todorovići neighborhood, went to the railway station that day to catch a train to see the doctor in Mitrovica. The demonstrators saw a group of Serbs at the station and ganged up on them with stones and poles. My father, who is 63, managed to escape to the school. The Albanians caught up with an elderly woman and hit her several times with wooden poles. My father stayed in the school building until dark when the demonstrators went off. Then he came back home.

S.T. Serb from Obiliq/Obilić, Todorovići neighborhood, displaced

HLC interview on 25 April 2004

6.2. Violence in Todorovići Neighborhood and YU Program Buildings

The next day, the demonstrations started with a march through the town by secondary school students. All the schools were shut. As the students marched along, they were joined by adults. The first building to be set on fire was the new Orthodox church. The demonstrators then proceeded to the Todorovići neighborhood where 25 Serb families lived. The Serbs fled. The demonstrators looted the houses and then torched them. KFOR evacuated the Serb residents of the YU Program buildings, leaving unsecured their apartments, which were all looted and devastated. The Serbs recognized among the demonstrators the parents of some students and neighbors. A van full of stones followed the demonstrators to keep them supplied with "ammunition" for stoning Serb houses, apartment buildings and the church. One Serb stepped in front of the demonstrators with a hand grenade and was arrested by UNMIK police. Albanians in Plemetina/Plemetinë left the village when they heard that local Serbs were preparing to go to the aid of Serbs in Obiliq/Obilić and that some people had been killed.

At about 8 in the morning [18 March] loud noises were heard again from the town center. A few minutes later, black smoke rose above two or three houses in the Todorovići neighborhood. Then smoke started coming from the church. I saw a mob of some 5,000 going toward the YU Program buildings. The Serbs were all in a state of panic. When they were thrown out of one building, the Serbs went to another that had Serb residents. And then they were thrown out of that one too. The violence went on all day (...) Evacuation was the only solution. Some Serbs were taken to the KFOR barracks and others to the villages of Plemetina and Babin Most (...) I think that all that the violence was done mostly by next-door neighbors.

S.A. Serb from Babin Most/Babimoc, Head of Communities Office, Obiliq/Obilić

HLC interview on 19 April 2004

On 18 March, at about 10 in the morning, I noticed a crowd of Albanian children going toward the church, with grownups following them (...) Then I suddenly saw smoke rising above the church (...) You could hear howling and celebrating. We saw the Albanian demonstrators coming toward our neighborhood from the church, shouting slogans in support of the UÇK, Hašim Taçi, and Ramuš Haradinaj (...) There were between 500 and 1,000 people, who started throwing stones and gasoline bombs at our houses. Several houses caught on fire. They came to our house, into the yard and started throwing stones. There were 11 of us inside at the time. We hid the children and old people in the bathroom, and my eldest son Bojan and I stood at the entrance, expecting the worst. I heard our dog howling and saw them kill it with stones. My father's house was already in flames. I realized they would kill us all if we didn't get out right away. My son and I opened the window in back of the house and lifted the children and my wife over and into the back yard. My father, mother, uncle and invalid aunt decided to stay in the house. My wife, four children, brother and I somehow got over the wire fence and started running toward Crkvena Vodica. We were cut off from the road and had to run through a swamp full of liquid waste from the power plant. The Albanians chased after us but the water stopped them. It got deeper and deeper and, at one point, was up to my waist. I carried the younger children on my shoulders and we somehow got to dry land. We were soaked through and terrified. We had nowhere to go and decided to stay where we were, hoping that someone would come along and save us. In the meantime, hundreds of hooligans were pelting my house with stones. It started to catch fire but my father, mother, uncle and aunt managed to put out the flames. Then an UNMIK police vehicle arrived. The police got them out of the house. But they set it alight anyway. We wept as we watched in burn.

S.T. Serb from Obiliq/Obilić, Todorovići neighborhood, displaced
HLC interview on 25 April 2004

The next day, 18 March, at 8.15 when the children left for school, demonstrations started outside the building. The demonstrators shouted 'Shkine jasht' - Out with the Serb women. The building was blocked off for about an hour, until KFOR evacuated us. The KPS did nothing to help. They stood in the street, just watching what was happening. Our apartments were not torched but were looted. We weren't able to take any of our belongings with us. I left in my bedroom slippers.

S.D. Serb from Obiliq/Obilić, YU Program buildings, displaced
HLC interview on 27 March 2004

There were demonstrations on 17 March but they were peaceful. Secondary school students gathered in the town center at about 2 p.m. and started marching through the town. They tried to get into the Town Hall but we went out and stopped them. It didn't last long and then everything quieted down (...) The student gathered again in the morning of 18 March, some 400 of them. They were manipulated by some people who are not from Obiliq. First they threw stones and then forced our Serb co-citizens out of their homes. We talked with the children's parents, telling them to go and get their children and take them home. The church was slightly damaged. It wasn't even completely finished and there were no icons in it. Its doors were broken down and four or five windows broken (...) According to unofficial figures, there were 12 people wounded or injured during the

unrest. One Serb by the last name of Spasić threw a hand grenade at the demonstrators. He was in custody for a few days and then released. There were cases of demonstrators beating up Serbs (...) Serbs in Plemetine village organized and armed themselves and were intending to come to Obiliq. They had been wrongly informed that some Serbs had been killed. A delegation from the Town Hall led by the Mayor went to Plemetinë where we talked with the Serbs and assured them that not a single Serb had been killed. So they gave up the idea of going to Obiliq. Still, some Albanian families asked to be evacuated from Plemetine.

E.H. Albanian from Obiliq/Obilić, municipal official
HLC interview on 19 April 2004



Serb Building, burned by Albanians; photo taken in Obiliq/Obilić © HLC

6.3. Conduct of KFOR, UNMIK Police and KPS

Some KPS members pointed out Serb-owned houses to the demonstrators. KFOR and the UNMIK police evacuated the Serbs but took no steps to protect their property. Demonstrators blocked the passage of KFOR to Serb districts, and the soldiers did not react even when Albanian flags were hoisted on their vehicles.

In my opinion, the main perpetrators of the violence were the Kosovo police [Albanians] who marched in front of the mob and were the first to demand the evacuation of the Serbs

(...) One Serb says that his Albanian neighbor, a policeman, set his house on fire. He refuses to give a statement to anybody. The UNMIK police were only observers that day. They took no steps to pacify the mob. Nor did the KFOR soldiers do anything, for that matter. All they did was to evacuate the Serbs.

S.A. Serb from Babin Most/Babimoc, Head of Communities Office, Obiliq/Obilić
HLC interview on 19 April 2004

There were only a handful of KPS police in the streets [on 18 March]. I didn't understand what was going on. I didn't see a single KFOR soldier or UNMIK policeman (...) A huge crowd of demonstrators led by Albanian police reached our neighborhood. The policemen literally directed them to our houses (...) Everything started burning but my father, mother, uncle and aunt managed to put out the fires. Then an UNMIK vehicle appeared. The policemen came inside and got them out of the house, which was then immediately set alight. An UNMIK police car came for us and took us to the police station. From there, KFOR drove us to their base in Priština where we stayed for the next seven days in miserable conditions. There were some Serbs from Obilić and Priština at the base, lots of small children and old and sick people. The KFOR soldiers treated us like animals. We couldn't wash properly, and were given only one blanket each even though it was very cold.

S.T. Serb from Obiliq/Obilić, Todorovići neighborhood, displaced
HLC interview on 25 April 2004

We were all at the end of our tether, exhausted, when I heard the voice of an acquaintance from the international police. He told us we had three minutes to pack a bag each, but we weren't able to take even that much. We scrambled into the KFOR carriers as quickly as we could. In the shoving and pushing, the glass shattered. I hurt my back. Our neighbors just watched and did not react.

S.K. Serb from Obiliq/Obilić, displaced
HLC interview on 27 April 2004

6.4. Aftermath

Our data brings out that 92 houses and 49 outbuildings, and 46 apartments in two buildings were burned. Fifty-five apartments and houses were looted (...) Three committees were established to evaluate the damage. The one set up by Albanians from the municipal offices estimated the damage at 1,145,306 Euros. I worked on the ground with my team and our estimate is 1,762,000 Euros. The joint committee with UNMIK put the damage at 1,862,000 Euros. But that is just the buildings themselves. There was valuable property inside those buildings, furniture and other things. We consider that the total damage is around three million Euros, not counting the school and the church. We assess that 37,320 Euros' worth of damage was done to the church alone, and 28,514 to the school. Also, some stores were plundered and farm machinery was stolen. About 10 vehicles owned by Serbs were burned (...) We have already been to clean up one building. The plan is for 24 Serb families to return. UNMIK and the humanitarian

organization GOAL have secured 30 container homes for people whose apartments were burned. We have been told that all the damaged buildings will be reconstructed by September. But people are not yet ready to come back, not even those whose homes were not damaged.

S.A. Serb from Babin Most/Babimoc, Head of Communities Office, Obiliq/Obilić
HLC interview on 19 April 2004

I will never forget that day. I lost everything but what I regret most of all is that we will probably never return to our poor, suffering Obilić.

S.Ć. Serb from Obiliq/Obilić, displaced
HLC interview on 7 April 2004

No Serbs have come back yet. They went mostly to villages in our municipality, Plemetinë, Babimoc and others. Some went to Mitrovicë or Graçanicë. We talked by phone with our Serb employees. They say other Serbs are preventing them from coming to work. Some of them have been to the Town Hall several times since the events, on personal business.

E.H. Albanian from Obilić/Obiliq, Municipal Communities Office
HLC interview on 19 April 2004

7. Torching and Killings in Lipjan/Lipljan

Several thousand Albanians started demonstrating in the streets of Lipjan/Lipljan at 2 p.m. on 17 March. Thirty Serb houses and four apartments in a YU Program building were looted and set on fire, as was also the Municipal Communities Office. Nenad Vesić, a Serb, was killed in his house. Two Albanians, Nexhat Rrahmani/Nedžat Rahmani and Arben Shala/Arben Šalja died in clashes with KFOR, and several people were injured. In some cases, Albanians prevented the burning of their Serb neighbors' houses. The demonstrators used firearms and explosives to attack Serbs and their property.

Before March, the security situation in Lipljan was at a high level. Serbs had started to move about town freely and to shop in Albanian-owned stores (...) But this ended with these events. The violence was aimed at expelling the Serbs. I am convinced that killing was not the goal. Albanians assembled in the main street around noon on 17 March. In the beginning, most of them were young, but they were joined later by older people. After marching through the town, they set out for the Serb houses (...) The mob started with the YU Program building in which there were several Serb families. They threw stones at it and broke the windows. KFOR got the residents out over the terrace of a next-door apartment. Then the demonstrators attacked the Serb houses that were close by. Some 30 Serb houses in Lipljan were looted and torched, as well as our Communities Office. Everything of value was taken. In addition, all Serb-owned stores were demolished. Nenad Vesić was shot dead that evening. Guns were also fired at houses and you can see the bullet holes in the walls. Almost all the Lipljan Serbs were evacuated to Serb village

such as Gušterica and Novo Naselje, and some went to Gračanica and Laplje Selo. I heard that some people were injured too, but I don't know their names (...) The same kind of campaign took place again the next day, 18 March.

B.N. Serb from Lipjan/Lipljan, Head of Communities Office,
HLC interview on 4 April 2004

The Belgrade daily *Blic* reported that the demonstrators headed for the church at about 5 p.m., breaking everything in their path. They threw a grenade at a Serb fleeing the mob. This Serb was arrested by the KPS when the demonstrators accused him of throwing a grenade at them. In the church, they found Father Randjel Denić, the parish priest, and seriously injured him.¹²

7.1. Conduct of KFOR, UNMIK Police and KPS

UNMIK and the KPS evacuated the Serbs, after which the demonstrators had a free rein to plunder and torch the properties. Kosovo police were in the vanguard of the demonstrations, ordering Serbs to leave their homes and claiming that they could not protect them from the mob. Without any grounds, they arrested the priest and the Serb who was fleeing from the demonstrators. KFOR did, however, prevent the complete destruction of the church.

What I don't understand is how all those KFOR troops, UNMIK and KPS couldn't prevent the violence against the Serbs. The KPS virtually aided the demonstrators. They went in front of the mob and ordered Serbs to leave their homes, supposedly because they couldn't protect them. In fact, it was them who made people leave their homes. An elderly man who refuses to testify claims that he saw two policemen preparing explosives to blow up the church (...) Serbs on the KPS don't have any real relations with their Albanian colleagues. They work only in Serb villages such as Gušterica.

B.N. Serb from Lipjan/Lipljan, Head of Communities Office,
HLC interview on 4 April 2004

¹² *Plucked Shrapnel From Own Body*, BLIC, 23 March 2004: "The grenade fell a few meters from me. I went into the parish house and the Albanians broke open the gates and came into the churchyard. All of a sudden, the KPS barged in the house. Confused, I bid them good day. 'What good day? Hands up!' they replied. I watched as they searched my house. Pushing the carpet. They said many bad things to me. They took me out with my hands cuffed and dragged me to the car. All the time, I felt blood coming down my face - the shrapnel wound on my forehead was the deepest one. Instead of taking me into the station, they left me outside in the car, on my own. And with handcuffs on. One Albanian policeman kept telling the others to take me inside, but they ignored him. 'At least bend over so that they can't see you,' he said to me. They didn't take the handcuffs off even in the station. My phone was in my pocket. My wife, friends, relatives were calling. I couldn't answer the phone and tell them what was happening with me. I was released when they intervened from Gračanica with an American acting as mediator. During the five hours in the station, no one gave me any medical attention. It was only when I got back home in the evening that a friend came. He washed my wound with strong plum brandy and I took out the shrapnel myself. It was only yesterday that a woman doctor with the Finnish battalion examined me."

7.2. Aftermath

By the end of May, 160 Serbs who had fled the town to surrounding Serb villages after the March violence, had returned to Lipjan/Lipljan. Only Albanians serve on the municipal damage evaluation committee, which is perceived by the Serbs as ethnic discrimination. The Serbs consider that the 200,000 Euros allocated by the committee is insufficient for the reconstruction of 30 severely damaged houses. A mixed committee comprising representatives of UNMIK and a US NGO assessed the damage at 411,000 Euros, or 13,700 Euros per house. Serbs are dissatisfied with this amount too, and consider that they should also be compensated for other property that was stolen or burned. Restoring inter-ethnic confidence will, however, be the toughest problem, in spite of some examples of Albanians organizing to defend the homes of Serb neighbors from the rampaging demonstrators.

The situation calmed down somewhat on 19 March. But Serbs are still afraid to move about in town. And those whose homes were not burned down are too scared to stay there. Only four or five men have returned to apartments in the YU Program building (...) I must emphasize that municipal bodies did absolutely nothing to prevent the violence against Serbs, and that is why we have almost no contact with them now. I hear that there have been official proposals to close down our office, which is a part of the municipal authority.

B.N. Serb from Lipjan/Lipljan, Head of Communities Office
HLC interview on 4 April 2004

The violence in our street broke out in the evening of 17 March. We let down the window shutters and peered out to see what was happening. The demonstrators headed for our street, but our neighbor two doors away, Burhan, stopped them from coming to our houses. We have never had any problems with our Albanian neighbors in the street. Three houses are Serb and all the others Albanian. I always said I felt safer when I saw Burhan taking his walks. Our street was left alone even after the evening of 17 March.

R.A. Serb from Lipjan/Lipljan
HLC interview on 4 April 2004

8. Shtimë/Štimlje

Serbs in Shtimë/Štimlje municipality had no information on what was happening all over Kosovo on 17 March and thus paid little attention to the demonstrators they saw and the slogans they were chanting. The protests became violent in the early evening when Albanians started throwing gasoline bombs at Serb-owned houses. Some Albanians participated in attacks on their Serb neighbors' property. The Orthodox church of the Archangel Michael was also torched.

I had a friend visiting me on 17 March. We stayed indoors all day and so didn't know what was going on. My daughter went to the Albanian shop twice. When she came back the second time, she said a mass of people were demonstrating in the town center and chanting 'Tači, Tači.' I thought it was just the usual kind of demonstration (...) A police patrol came to my house at about 7.40 p.m. They were Albanian. They asked what was new. I didn't know why they asked me that but said, no, nothing new. A gasoline bomb was thrown into my yard after they had left. It landed on concrete so the fire couldn't spread. I rushed out into the street but saw no one. I suspect that it was thrown in by my neighbors who want me to leave. I called the number the policeman had given me. They came quickly and said they had no idea who could have done it. Before they left, one of them said the situation was very bad and that they couldn't ensure the safety of everyone. I was very disturbed (...) Not 20 minutes later, another gasoline bomb was thrown into the yard and I called the police again. The second bomb didn't do much harm either. When the police came, I asked them to take the children somewhere where they would be safe. They said they had to ask their commanding officer and left. I called an Albanian taxi driver whose services I often used, but he said he couldn't come. Then I called another and he said he would be along a little later. He never showed up.

N.J. Serb from Shtimë/Štimlje, Serb community representative
HLC interview on 14 June 2004

The KPS evacuated the Shtimë/Štimlje Serbs to surrounding villages, even though many of them did not wish to leave their homes. Only one Serb house was left intact because it had been illegally occupied by an Albanian. A Serb was slightly wounded in the violence. Serbs believe that the destruction of their property was an organized action.

My phone rang at about 10.20 p.m. It was a policeman who told me to be ready in five minutes as he would not be able to evacuate us later. They arrived in about 10 minutes and put all six of us into their car. I didn't notice anything as we left Štimlje. They drove us to Novo Naselje and said they had to go back to evacuate others. We went to a Serb family who live in Novo Naselje and stayed with them for three days. The next day, I met others Serbs from Štimlje who were also evacuated by the police, some before and some after us. They were all taken to Serb villages in Lipljan municipality. I learned from them that gasoline bombs had been thrown at their houses. Only one man was hurt. His name is Mile Mirić and, when a gasoline bomb landed in his yard, he went out into the street. He was stoned (...) Some of them said the police had evacuated them by force, that they didn't want to leave their homes. All of them were evacuated before midnight. I think it was all orchestrated as all the Serb houses were looted and then torched in the night of 17/18 March. Only one Serb house wasn't burned and that was because it had been illegally occupied by an Albanian. I wouldn't be surprised if he was the one who torched our houses because he always coveted our land. Two cultivators and a tractor with all its attachments were stolen in addition to the household things.

N.J. Serb from Shtimë/Štimlje, Serb community representative
HLC interview on 14 June 2004

Shtimë/Štimlje municipality established a committee to assess the damage on which Serbs have one representative. In his view, the estimated compensation is not in proportion to the damage done to property. Not a single Serb had returned to Shtimë/Štimlje by mid-June.

The municipality set up a damage evaluation committee. I served on it. I went with them to every Serb house. It all looked really awful. Everything had been looted and burned, even unimportant things like flowers and fruit trees. The committee put the damage at 112,000 Euros. I disagreed because that would not be enough even for the roughest reconstruction of the buildings. And every house was full of furniture and various appliances. At the municipality, they said they were sorry it happened. But not one of the perpetrators has been arrested though it isn't hard to uncover them (...) For a time I rented a house in Suvi Dol but I am now in Novo Naselje where I pay 50 Euros rent. And I don't even have a bathroom. I get 65 Euros a month in welfare. No one is willing to help us. Earlier, my rent was paid by the municipality because of the children who went to school here. They said they would continue paying the rent. We received some aid in food a few times. But that's not enough to live on. I don't know what to think anymore. How can I go back knowing that my neighbors did all this to me? I would consider returning to Štimlje only if they rebuilt my house as it used to be, and compensated me for everything that was stolen. We are not receiving any aid from Serbia either.

N.J. Serb from Shtimë/Štimlje, Serb community representative
HLC interview on 14 June 2004

9. Destruction of Property and Killing in Gjilan/Gnjilane

The demonstrations started at 3 p.m. on 17 March with the blocking of the intersection at the edge of town. Demonstrators then proceeded to the part of town in which a Serb neighborhood and Orthodox church are located. The houses were first pelted with stones brought to the scene in a tractor with trailer, after which the demonstrators stormed into the houses, beat the people inside, and stole and broke furniture and other belongings. Over 20 Serbs, mainly elderly, were severely beaten. Those houses from which Serbs managed to escape were torched. The church of St Nicholas suffered minor damage. The demonstrators also attacked the UNMIK administration building. Slobodan Perić, a Serb physical education teacher at a secondary technical school, was killed.¹³ Serbs were evacuated to Šilovo/Shillovë village.¹⁴ Eighteen Serb-owned houses were burned, 70 were looted and severely damaged, and about 20 cars belonging to Serbs and several UNMIK vehicles were completely destroyed. According to the Serbs, the demonstrators knew exactly which cars belonged to Serbs serving on the KPS. In some cases, Albanians gave refuge to their Serb neighbors.

¹³ "Slayer of Serb Arrested," BLIC, 8 April 2004: "UNMIK spokesman Neeraj Singh stated that a young Albanian had been arrested for the murder of Slobodan Perić."

¹⁴ "Kosmet, 18 March, From Hour to Hour," BALKAN, 19 March 2004.

I live with my family in Kusce village. I work for the Gnjilane KPS and am a security officer at the Gnjilane District Court (...) We had no problems at work up until these events. Demonstrations had been scheduled in Gnjilane for 16 March so I didn't go to work in my car because it still has the old license plates. The next day, 17 March, I went with a colleague in my car, parking it outside the Kristal Hotel, right next to the courthouse and the police station, and right up against a concrete barrier so that the front license plate was out of sight. There were a lot of cars parked there, of which about 10 belonged to Serbs. We had a trial that day. We heard noises from outside and saw a crowd of people. The judge, a Serb, adjourned the trial. It was about 3 p.m. I went out and realized I wouldn't be able to move the car because there were so many people. The judges left in a car from the court's pool and me and my colleague stayed in the courthouse. The Albanians began setting fire to the cars. I heard someone shout, 'Hajde me djege nje Golf pa tabela', which means 'Let's burn this Golf without plates' (...) I went up to the second floor to get a better view of what was happening outside. They pushed my car into the street, turned it on its side and set fire to it (...) There were no police, and taxi drivers, who have a stand in front of the hotel, helped them. There were other cars belonging to Serbs with Kosovo plates. They were burned too. The taxi drivers must have told them which cars belonged to Serbs. I think one of them even gave them a bottle of gasoline to pour over my car (...) Things calmed down late in the evening. It was about 11 p.m. when the international police came and drove us home. We heard later that 18 Serb houses had been burned and about 70 looted and badly damaged. We also heard that a Serb whose name I don't know, he was known by the nickname Bobi, was killed.

K.K. Serb, KPS member
HLC interview on 26 March 2004.



Serb cars, burned by Albanians; photo taken in Gjilan/Gnjilane © HLC

We [Serb police officers] came back from our beat about 7 p.m. Demonstrators were still in the streets of Gnjilane. I saw that some Serb houses had been burned and many more looted and damaged. I heard the next day that about 18 Serb houses around the church had been torched. Over 70 others were looted and damaged. Some Serb shops were also demolished. I heard that a Serb had been killed in the town center. He lived with his mother. There were 14 burnt-out cars on the plaza in front of the Kristal Hotel, three of which were UN jeeps. Mine, which had the old plates, was among them. There were a lot of cars owned by Albanians there too, but none of them had been damaged. The demonstrators couldn't have identified cars owned by Serbs only by the license plates because some had Kosovo plates. It must have been a group who knows all us Serbs who work for the KPS.

K.K. Serb, Gjilan/Gnjilane KPS member
HLC interview on 26 March 2004

The Belgrade media reported the number of beaten Serbs who were being treated in hospitals in Serbia. One man, who believes he survived only because his assailants thought he was dead, said the demonstrators showed no mercy even to his ailing mother.¹⁵

9.1. Conduct of KFOR, UNMIK Police, KPS and KPC

US troops with KFOR intervened twice: to prevent the burning of the Orthodox church and to prevent damage to the UNMIK administration building. All Serb officers serving on the KPS were sent on assignments outside of Gjilan/Gnjilane on 17 March. KFOR imposed a curfew on 18 March, with KFOR and KPC troops patrolling the streets.

I joined the KPS a year ago, and serve at the Gnjilane police station. We Serb policemen were often assigned to tour Serb-populated villages in Gnjilane municipality. But on 17 March 2004, we were ordered to Čaglavica. It was only in the late afternoon that I heard there had been unrest and violence in Gnjilane itself (...) The regional and municipal police stations and the courthouse are right next to the hotel where the cars were burned. How is it possible that all this happened in the immediate vicinity of the police, who are supposed to protect citizens and their property?

S.D. Serb, KPS member
HLC interview on 26 March 2004

¹⁵ *Horror and Terror*, KURIR, 23 March 2004: "They howled outside. It was a terrifying sight. My mother and I were upstairs. I could have jumped out of the window and fled to the churchyard, but I couldn't leave my mother. She can't move about without my help. The Albanians soon broke down the front door and stormed into our house. They attacked her first. One swung some kind of club and I jumped forward to protect her. They hit me with poles, thick sticks. I don't know how I held out after getting a blow to my head with a metal bar. I felt as if they had split my skull in two. Blood spurted upward. I staggered and fell over my mother. I squeezed her hand to let her know I was alive. The Albanians left, thinking that we were dead. I don't know how long it was before the KFOR soldiers arrived. They picked us up and we moaned with the pain."

9.2. Aftermath

Serbs continued to serve on the KPS following the March events but are escorted to work by international police. They have lost all confidence in life together with Albanians. The burning of Serb homes is perceived as a message that there is no future for them in Kosovo.¹⁶

In spite of what happened, and it's pressure pure and simple, we continue to work and do our duty. We protect all citizens, Albanians most of all. I hope we will be compensated; otherwise we won't be able to work anymore.

S.D. Serb, KPS member
HLC interview on 26 March 2004

We [Serbs] who work at the prison and in the police are still coming to work regularly, except that now the UNMIK police have to drive us to and from work. I don't know who needed all this, especially since our relations with the Albanians were good in recent times. We moved around town quite freely. What happened has put us back. We have again lost confidence in a joint life. I hope the damage will be fixed soon and that people will be able to return to a normal life. My Albanian colleagues behave normally with us, like before 17 March.

N.J. Serb, guard at Gjilan/Gjnilane District Prison
HLC interview on 6 April 2004

10. Violence in Viti/Vitina

Some 300 Albanians participated in the demonstrations on 17 March, stoning Serbs and their homes. Several Serbs sustained serious injuries. The demonstrators broke the windows of houses along their route. This protest did not last very long, but the demonstrations staged the next day, 18 March, were more organized and involved some 1,000 people. The demonstrators were led by an Albanian with a megaphone. Many Serb houses were badly damaged and 10 were torched. An UNMIK bus used to transport Serb children to school was also burned.

At first, we thought it was a peaceful demonstration. None of us even dreamed that something like that would happen in Vitina. A mob of 300 turned up about 5.30 p.m., chanting all kinds of slogans. I found this odd as there had been no demonstrations in our street until then. They stopped in front of our yard and began throwing stones at the

¹⁶ *Orgy of Blood in Gnjilane*, POLITIKA, 25 March 2004: "Look, this is how we came, with only the clothes on our backs. Not a single bundle of belongings, no paper, no money, nothing. Everything went up in flames. I can't believe that this has happened to us. Why are we still alive? What do we have to live for? Everything has tumbled down and gone forever."

house. Then they barged into the yard and broke everything in their path. Three cars were parked in my yard. They trashed them and then set them on fire. As the cars burned, some of them danced around them. There were nine of us in the house, six of whom children. We were very scared. We locked the door and prayed it wouldn't come to the worst.

N.Ž. Serb from Viti/Vitina

HLC interview on 17 May 2004



Serb houses and cars burned by Albanians; photo taken in Viti/Vitina © HLC

My father Stojadin Savić went to my aunt's at about 2.30 p.m. on 17 March. My mother Borka was there with Aunt Živka, in front of the house, when the mob arrived. There were about 300 people, some from Vitina and some from around it. KPS members were with them. They went in Tomislav Nojić's yard first. Scared, Aunt Živka shut the door and went upstairs. My mother started running back to our house. A stone hit her on the nose and a brick struck her on the leg. To protect herself, she said 'Run, my husband is coming with a gun.' The mob pulled back. The windows of our house were smashed. In the meantime, my father had reached my aunt's house. Stones were thrown at them. One hit my father's nose, and somebody hit my aunt over the back with a stick. My mother, father, uncle and aunt fled to their neighbor Zlatko Petković where they stayed until dark, when things calmed down (...) Then they came to our place. When I got home, I saw that all the

windows were broken. Nobody came to our door, either the police or anyone else, to see how we were and if we needed anything.

B.S. Serb from Viti/Vitina
HLC interview on 17 May 2004

There was a power cut about 2 p.m. on 18 March. Less than half an hour later, a big crowd appeared, coming from the town center. Over 1,000 of them. The demonstrators chanted 'UÇK, UÇK' and other slogans. They were carrying American and Albanian flags. They reached the church. An Albanian with a bull horn was leading them. At the church, he supposedly called on the people to disperse. But the mob went on chanting. Then they went to my aunt's house and set it on fire. I was at a neighbor's and watched everything from the window. Some of them went to another house, in which there was a restaurant on the first floor, and torched it too. There was a fire engine there, and the firemen waited until a house was torched and then started putting out the fires. (...) After a while, the mob made its way toward my house. First they torched the house of my aunt Desanka Švabić, then the house and cafe of Tomislav Nojić. They broke down my wooden fence and the door of my cafe, which I hadn't finished building yet. They threw a Molotov cocktail inside and the cafe started to burn (...) After that, the mob made its way to the Dajić neighborhood where two Serb houses were burned. A third house was looted, and the UNMIK bus which used to take the Serb children to school was set on fire (...) The car of Novica Pržić was also burned. He was on his way to town and, when he saw the mob, parked the car in front of an Albanian house and ran away. A helicopter flew over the town about 6 in the evening. That was when the mob dispersed.

B.S. Serb from Viti/Vitina
HLC interview on 17 May 2004

10.1. Conduct of KFOR, UNMIK Police and KPS

The few members of KFOR and the UNMIK police on the scene merely observed what was going on. Several Serbs saw some KPS members setting fire to houses together with the demonstrators. They also saw that the demonstrators fled when confronted by a larger number of police prepared to go into action. The KPS evacuated the Serbs who were attacked. Its members apparently acted without instructions, each according to his own impulse.¹⁷ On 17 and 18 March, the Serb police officers were confined to the police station. There were no UNMIK police in the streets of Viti/Vitina during the two days of unrest. Some KPS members, in civilian clothes, were observed among the demonstrators. It was only after the violence on 17 March ended that KFOR, assisted by the KPS, blocked access to Serb neighborhoods. When Albanians took to the streets the next day, 18 March, KFOR again failed to react.

¹⁷ *Beaten Until Unconscious*, GLAS JAVNOSTI, 21 March 2004: "On Thursday morning [18 March] an Albanian mob attacked the house. They trashed my car. Luckily, the KPS came along and they moved off. But they soon came back. There were several police around my house even then. One tried to stop them but another said to him in Albanian to leave them alone. They rushed the house and I jumped over the terrace to run away. They saw me and caught up with me in the yard. They began to hit and kick me and I don't remember anything else. I woke up in the Vitina hospital."

There were Kosovo police [Albanians] as well as KFOR troops in the street, next to my yard, but they didn't react. Maybe because there weren't many of them. After a while, KPS reinforcements arrived in several vehicles. They parked in front of the gate and came into the yard on foot. The hooligans in the yard ran away. We refused to open the door and the police broke it down. They came inside and said they had to evacuate us. They escorted us to their vehicles and drove us all to the police station.

N.Ž. Serb from Viti/Vitina
HLC interview on 17 May 2004

The KPS was there [on 17 March] but didn't do a thing, and neither did KFOR although they had a checkpoint a few dozen meters away (...) KFOR blocked the road that evening so that no one could get through. There were three or four members of the KPC with KFOR when they blocked the road. [On 18 March] I saw several KPC members in civvies in the mob. KFOR and the KPS police were in the streets but did almost nothing to stop the violence. Oddly enough, I didn't see a single UNMIK policeman or Serb on the KPS. I heard later on that the Serb members of the KPS were in the police station and weren't allowed to go out for their own safety (...) A little later, I saw KPS police throwing planks into the cafe so that it would burn faster.

B.S. Serb from Viti/Vitina
HLC interview on 17 May 2004

10.2. Aftermath

The Serbs expected municipal officials of Albanian ethnicity to prevent the violence against them. The Viti/Vitina mayor and an officer of the US contingent with KFOR wished to meet with Serbs after the March events, and were turned down. In general, Serbs also expected more from their Albanian neighbors. But they point up as a positive example the Albanians in Svetosavska Street and at the "yellow building" who, with their families went out into the street and stopped the demonstrators from setting fire to Serb-owned houses. Some Belgrade media reported that, following the evacuation of the Serbs, their houses were marked with white paint and the names of their Albanian "future owners."¹⁸ A week later, 60 Serbs who had fled to Vrbovac/Urbode returned to their homes. Reconstruction of the first houses started in June.

Another 10 houses besides ours were burned in Vitina. We came back after 15 days and now live in my part of the house, which didn't burn down. We have had no trouble so far. The damage evaluation committee made an inspection and put the damage at 158,000 Euros. But the damage to my property alone is much higher. I don't know how they think they are going to reconstruct all those houses and pay compensation for the destroyed cars with that amount of money.

N.Ž. Serb from Viti/Vitina
HLC interview on 17 May 2004

¹⁸ "Fire Again," *Večernje Novosti*, 23 March 2004.

After these events, Vitina Mayor Musa Misini and a commander of the American KFOR wanted to have a meeting with us. But we didn't agree to see them because they did nothing to prevent the violence against the Serbs. I hear that a damage evaluation committee has done an inspection but we haven't been told anything - not when our houses will be reconstructed or what the damage estimates are. Nor were our Albanian neighbors willing to prevent the torching of our houses. There were cases of Albanians helping, but not in our neighborhood. One was in Svetosavska Street where the Albanians and their families went out in the street and didn't let the mob near the Serb houses. The same happened near the yellow building.

B.S. Serb from Viti/Vitina
HLC interview on 17 May 2004

11. Ashkali Neighborhood in Vushtrri/Vučitrn Torched

Ninety-five Ashkali families with a total of 434 members lived in Vushtrri/Vučitrn, the only minority community in the town. Most were returnees who lived in reconstructed or newly built houses. Several hundred Albanians congregated in the town's central square, chanting slogans against UNMIK, claiming that it was incapable of protecting the rights of Kosovo Albanians, in particular children.¹⁹ That day, the demonstrations ended without any incidents. But on 18 March, demonstrators gathered again in the afternoon, at first only between 70 and 80 people, with the number growing as darkness fell. They first set fire to the Orthodox church of St Elijah and then stormed into the Ashkali neighborhood and burned almost all the houses there.

The Orthodox church was set on fire at about 4.30 p.m. [on 18 March]. I saw a group of people, not large - between 70 and 80 - going in the direction of the Ashkali neighborhood. It was the most extreme group. Curious people formed another group and at first only watched what was going on. However, some people from the second group joined the extremists in the first group. It was getting dark and you couldn't tell anymore who was who. They went into the Ashkali neighborhood and started setting fire to the houses.

T.H. Albanian from Vushtrri/Vučitrn, Minorities and Communities Office
HLC interview on 26 April 2004

The violence spilled over into Slatina/Slatinë village where 15 Serb houses were burned, eight of which were uninhabited. Serbs in Gojbulje/Gojbujë say that Albanians from Studimë/Sudimlje carried out an armed attack on their village, and also fired at French KFOR troops.²⁰

¹⁹ *Bloody Day in Kosovo, Many Dead and Injured*, ZERI, 18 March 2004

²⁰ *Defended Village for Four Days*, GLAS JAVNOSTI, 24 March 2004: "The attack started about 6.30 in the evening with gunfire. There were about 10 KFOR soldiers in the village at the time and they weren't able to protect us. They suggested that we be evacuated. We refused and only the women, children and sick



Ashkali house burned by Albanians; photo taken in Vushtrri/Vučitrn © HLC

There were no incidents in other villages in the municipality such as Prilluzhe, where there are Serbs, or Gojbujë and Banjska. We have only one village in which 15 houses were burned. That is Sllatinë. Of those 15 houses, seven were inhabited and the others were empty. The houses were set on fire in the night between 17 and 18 March. Several Serbs were beaten up on that occasion. I haven't been able to reach them to talk.

T.H. Albanian from Vushtrri/Vučitrn, Minorities and Communities Office
HLC interview on 26 April 2004

got into the truck. About 40 men stayed in the village (...) When the women and children left, those who had stayed organized themselves to defend the village. They had no choice. It was either stay and defend the village or be evacuated. The easiest thing to do is to go and leave everything. If we had gone, we would have had nothing to come back to (...) The French soldiers were taken by surprise by the attacks on them (...) The danger is over, at least for the time being. The children have come back to the village. But you never know when the Albanians will attack again."

11.1. Conduct of KFOR, UNMIK Police and KPS

The evacuation of the Ashkalis was organized by the KPS and assisted by some Albanians. There was no international police presence during the attack and the evacuation.

The police began evacuating Ashkalis from their homes at about 7 p.m. Interestingly enough, it was only the KPS. The UNMIK police were not there. A lot of Albanian citizens helped the evacuation. I was one of them. I had to make sure that we didn't encounter those extremists because that would have been dangerous. We took some of the Ashkalis out by the back streets and to the police school in Vushtrri (...) where they spent the night. They were transferred to the KFOR base in Smrekovnicë the next day and stayed there until 21 March when they were finally taken to the military base in Novosellë të Magjunajve . They are still there. I have tried to contact them a number of times but they refuse to see me.

T.H. Albanian from Vushtrri/Vučitrn, Minorities and Communities Office

HLC interview on 26 April 2004

11.2. Aftermath

Shortly after their homes were destroyed, the Ashkalis publicly called for assistance in emigrating to third countries.

A total of 71 houses was destroyed, of which 54 burned to the ground and nine were partly burned. Three were demolished, and one partly demolished. Two shops were destroyed, as well as 44 outbuildings. According to some estimates, the damage has been evaluated at 1,200,000 Euros.

T.H. Albanian from Vushtrri/Vučitrn, Minorities and Communities Office

HLC interview on 26 April 2004

12. Evacuation of the elderly under a hail of stones in Ferizaj/Uroševac

Until 18 March 12 Serbs – 10 old women and 2 old men – lived in Ferizaj/Uroševac under the permanent protection of the Greek KFOR. These Serbs left their homes twice a month to go to Štrpce/Shtërpçë for shopping or to see a doctor, always escorted by KFOR. During the demonstrations on 17 March their houses were stoned but, they say, they paid no attention to it as these things happened from time to time. The next day, 18 March, some 3000 people staged protests in the town. A largish group of demonstrators headed for the Serb houses and the church. Like in other towns, the demonstrators started

their attack by throwing stones. Members of the Greek and American KFOR evacuated the Serbs protecting them with their bodies although some women were opposed to leaving their homes. After the Serbs had entered KFOR vehicles, the demonstrators set their houses on fire. The Church of Holy Tsar Uroš was also destroyed. Having seen on television how the demonstrators threw stones at the Serbs an Albanian woman visited them at the KFOR base. On 17 and 18 March 46 persons were injured in Ferizaj/Uroševac and Alumuhamet Murseli was killed. Dušanka Petković died at the KFOR base a day after she left her home.

On 17 March we heard that there were demonstrations in the town. We had already gathered as much because they were throwing stones at our gate. It was not a rare event (...). The night was quiet. The next day, 18 March, around 10 o'clock, the crowd gathered in front of our houses (...) There was tremendous din in the street but when the soldiers came and took us out everything went dead silent. The demonstrators stopped. I looked in their direction. In the front row there was a young man dressed in black. He was between 25 and 28 years old. He made a sign with his hand and the attack on us started. They threw stones at us. Policemen [KPS] were standing in front of them but they did nothing. The American KFOR soldiers protected my mother with their bodies. A stone hit me in the right knee. My I sustained received a very severe injury to my thighbone. I'm a paralytic and this has made my life even harder (...) After they put us in the vehicles, there was applause (...) They brought us to the Greek KFOR base. Other Serbs were evacuated by the KPS. UNMIK police estimate that there were about 3000 people, mostly young, but their leaders were not all that young (...) An Albanian woman who had seen on television how we had come out of our houses... decided to visit us here. She wept when she saw us.

L.N. Serb woman from Ferizaj/Uroševac who was stoned by the demonstrators
HLC interview, 2 May 2004

Around 10 o'clock the Greek KFOR arrived and told us they had to evacuate us. I did not want to leave the house at any cost. I locked the door and shut myself inside. Some time around noon the police [KPS] came. Four of them broke the door and entered. I wept and begged them not to throw me out of my house. They wouldn't even listen to me. They dragged me out and put me in their car. I had bruises after that. They took me straight to the Greek KFOR base. I found other Serbs there. I was the last one to be brought there. Food and drink here are good. If we want to go to Štrpce, the soldiers drive us there and back. However, they won't feed us here forever. Later on I found out that my house had first been looted and then torched. Then all the Serb houses in the town were torched. I no longer have a house now and have nothing to leave to my grandchildren. That is why I did not want to leave the house. It would've been better had I burnt together with the house. There was some commission to assess the damage, but I don't believe a word they say.

V.S. Serb woman from Ferizaj/Uroševac, whom the police took out of her house by force
HLC interview, 2 May 2004

12.1. Conduct of KFOR, UNMIK Police and KPS

KFOR, UNMIK police and KPS did not prevent the demonstrators from gathering in front of the Serb houses, launching a degrading attack on old people and destroying their property. The KPS and KFOR performed the evacuation. During the evacuation American soldiers protected the old people with their bodies. Greek and American soldiers tried to prevent the destruction of the Church of Holy Uroš and were exposed to the demonstrators' attack. One Greek soldier sustained severe injuries and 16 soldiers were injured lightly.²¹

The UNMIK police and KPS visited us the first day [17 March] but we do not trust them and we were proven right the next day (...) There was a Greek tank in front of the gate. The mob started hurling stones at our gate. They were also throwing stones at the tank. A Greek soldier was hit in the head on that occasion. The tank then left, presumably to attend to that soldier's wound. At half past eleven the UNMIK police called. They told us not to go out because the Americans were on the way to fetch us. Fifteen minutes later the American KFOR arrived with two vehicles. They parked on both sides of our gate and thus made a small corridor for us. The American soldiers were rough and ordered us to get ready in two minutes. We refused to leave the house. Then three soldiers grabbed the chair in which my mother was sitting and carried her to their vehicle. My sister refused to come out but when she saw that our mother and I were in the street, she came too (...) Stones were thrown at us as we were coming out. Albanian policemen were in front of them but did not react at all. The soldiers of the American KFOR protected my mother with their bodies.

L.N. Serb woman from Ferizaj/Uroševac, evacuated by US soldiers
HLC interview, 2 May 2004

The next day Colonel Sanders, the deputy commander from the American base, came. Just before he arrived representatives of the UNMIK police told us that our houses had been torched. Colonel Sanders said the same thing. Dušanka Petković, who was a cardiac patient turned to the colonel and said: "And where were you? Why didn't you

²¹ *A Crowd of Bandits Threw Bombs at My House*, NEDELJNI TELEGRAF, 24 March 2004: "... on March 17, in Uroševac some 500 of them threw grenades and bottles with petrol on KFOR tanks. The attack continued even as the Greek commander ordered his soldiers to fire into the air to disperse the demonstrators. The attackers did not withdraw and instead their number increased – to 3000. That is how it was until the arrival of American helicopters who sprayed the gathered Albanians with tear gas. During the clash a member of the 525th Greek Mechanised Parachute Battalion sustained second degree burns on his face and neck while defending the observation point next to the Church of Holy Uroš in Uroševac where the Serb refugees had found shelter. Explosive devices thrown by the Albanians injured one American and 16 Greek soldiers. The senseless acts of violence, the destruction of holy places and the attacks on innocent civilians have all painted a picture that the world is not likely to forget soon (...) I have heard stories from the media that some of my soldiers had instigated these incidents. That is not true. Those false witnesses have forgotten to say how fire had been opened on my Greek and the American soldiers protecting the Church of Holy Uroš, that some twenty hand-held grenades had been thrown and that incendiary grenades were thrown at soldiers so as to injure them or kill them. (...) I also think that all the leaders are responsible for such attacks and by this I mean primarily the leadership of the Municipal Assembly in Uroševac."

protect us?” After that she felt ill. She collapsed and she died within 15 minutes. Greek doctors tried to help her but it was to no avail.

L.N. Serb woman from Ferizaj/Uroševac, evacuated by US soldiers
HLC interview, 2 May 2004

13. Destruction of churches in Gjakovë/Đakovica

Over one thousand Albanians gathered in the streets around 14:00 on 17 March to protest against the children's death and express their support to the Albanians in Southern Mitrovicë/Mitrovica. The demonstrators included young Albanians from out of town for whom transport had been organised. After a walk through the town the demonstrators gathered in front of the municipal hall where representatives of the municipal assembly addressed them and expressed their solidarity with them. To prevent more people from joining the crowd, Italian soldiers closed all the streets leading towards the municipal hall. After the demonstrators beat up a foreigner, a KFOR combat vehicle passed through the crowd provoking new protests among the demonstrators.²² The demonstrators then started towards the churches, two of which had been abandoned. In the third church, the Temple of the Assumption of the Virgin, there were five old women, the only Serb women left in Gjakovë/Đakovica. Members of the Italian KFOR who had been guarding them round the clock, barely managed to evacuate them before the onslaught of the crowd. The demonstrators torched that church and two more, the Cathedral Church of the Holy Trinity and the Church of Holy Prince Lazar. A few days later the municipal authorities organised the removal of the rubble.

14. Evacuation of Returnees from Biča/Biq and Grabac/Grapc

On 17 March, some 1,500 Albanians from Klinë/Klina headed for Biča/Biq and Grabac/Grapc via the Albanian village of Shtupel/Štupelj. Biča/Biq Serbs have learned that attacks on the two Serb villages were prevented by a representative of Shtupel/Štupelj who managed to persuade the mob to turn back. Nonetheless, one house in Biča/Biq was burned, and three looted and severely damaged.

During the night of 17/18 March, Italian KFOR troops evacuated some 60 Serbs from Biča/Biq to their base in Gjakovë/Đakovica, and airlifted between 30 and 40 Grabac/Grapc Serbs to Osojane/Osojan village. The evacuated Serbs returned to their homes on 25 March and were visited by the Klinë/Klina mayor, who promised that their houses would be repaired and that they would receive compensation paid for their damaged property.

To get from Klina to Biča and Grabac, you have to go through the Albanian village of Štupelj. When the Albanian mob got to Štupelj, a representative of the village stood in

²² *A Bloody Day in Kosovo, Many Killed and Wounded*, ZERI, 18 March 2004.

front of them and stopped them from continuing to Biča and Grabac. KFOR had in the meantime prepared to evacuate the Biča Serbs. Shooting from the nearby hills started around 8 o'clock in the evening; we couldn't see who was firing. They probably fired in the air because no bullets came into the village. People were scared. The Italian soldiers told them to climb into the trucks. The Biča villagers sat in the trucks until 4 a.m (...) when they were driven to the Italian base near Djakovica. Returnees to Grabac were flown by KFOR helicopters to Osojane. Biča and Grabac were empty from 18 to 25 March. When we came back, we saw that a house at the end of the village, near the Albanian village Ozdrime, had been burned down, and three houses in the village itself looted and badly damaged. The other houses were untouched, nothing was stolen from them. People were glad that their houses had escaped being burnt down, but they were still afraid. Shortly after we came back, Rame Manaj, the Klina mayor, came and promised that the burned house and the three damaged ones would soon be reconstructed. I think he really meant it. Twenty-five men from Klina and about 30 Serbs from Biča are in the village now. All of them go to Serbia sometimes, but spend most of their time here. We have organized transport to Mitrovica once a week to buy groceries and other necessities. The KPS come around every day and they behave correctly. The UNMIK police come only once in a long while.

B.D. Serb returnee to Biča/Biq
HLC interview on 13 June 2004

14.1. Conduct of KFOR, UNMIK Police and KPS

KFOR evacuated the Biča/Biq and Grabac/Grapc Serbs as a precautionary measure. Since their return, the villages are patrolled daily by the KPS.

14.2. Aftermath

The Biča/Biq Serbs believe that their safety depends on being on good terms with their Albanian neighbors. Some Albanians occasionally come to visit them, but still do so covertly.

I feel sorry for the Belo Polje people, but they returned to the village without first reaching an agreement with the Albanians. That is why the Albanians have never accepted their return. Since the March events, I have been thinking of going into politics. Those people in Mitrovica irritate me most of all. They still don't realize that dialogue with the Albanians is our only protection. KFOR comes and goes and we are left unprotected again (...) Albanians come to see us, especially those with whom we were on good terms before March, but still secretly. A funny thing happened once. An Albanian couple came to visit with me and, shortly afterwards, another Albanian arrived on my doorstep. I knew I couldn't let him in because he would have seen the couple already inside. Also, they would have seen him coming to visit with a Serb. Everybody is afraid of

being informed on by everybody else. I had to apologize and say I was too busy to have coffee with him then, and ask him to come back a couple of hours later. To my guests inside, I said a Serb had come to ask me to go over to his place later on to help him with something or other. After a while, the couple left and the Albanian whom I hadn't let in dropped by again for coffee.

B.D. Serb returnee to Biča/Biq
HLC interview on 13 June 2004

Biča was very lucky during the March violence. Only one house was torched. All the houses are being reconstructed now, and at a good pace. My brother and I recently finished building six new houses for Serbs. But there isn't much else you can do around here. We spend two months out of the year in Biča. It's so boring, the same stories being retold every day. But it can't be any different because people can't leave the village. Their life would be richer if they could, but... Some Albanians come at times but never two at the same time. They are afraid of being informed on. They say they are very scared of the Albanians who moved into this area from northern Albanian. These are very violent and keep stealing from them. The only interesting thing that happened since March was the Ascension Day procession. It's our village feast day. Otherwise nothing at all goes on.

R.D. Serb returnee to Biča/Biq
HLC interview on 10 July 2004

15. Serb Returnees to Belo Polje/Bellopojë Attacked and Their Homes Torched

The demonstrations in Pejë/Peć started at 2 p.m. on 17 March when several thousand Albanians gathered in the town's central square, chanting slogans against UNMIK and the Serbs.²³ The Kosovo daily *Koha Ditore* reported that the situation deteriorated half an hour later when UNMIK police opened fire at the demonstrators, who then stoned the UNMIK administration building, set on fire several UNMIK vehicles, and torched the Serbian Orthodox church of St John the Baptist.²⁴ A group of some 200 to 300 Albanians split away from the main body of demonstrators and headed to the Serb village of Belo Polje/Bellopojë in which 34 men, all returnees, lived. At the time, a meeting was under way at which the returnees were discussing with other displaced villagers their return and reconstruction of their houses. Italian KFOR troops prevented the group from entering the village, but Albanians began arriving in increasing numbers, passing without hindrance through the KPS checkpoint just outside Belo Polje/Bellopojë. Eyewitnesses estimate that between 4,000 and 5,000 Albanians eventually stormed and ravaged the village. The demonstrators torched the 25 reconstructed houses and the power substation, vandalized the Serb cemetery, and set on fire the Orthodox church of the Annunciation of the Holy Mother of God. The Italian KFOR soldiers evacuated the Serbs, but not before several were seriously injured. Esat Tahiraj, an Albanian from Novosellë/Novo Selo,

²³ "Bloody Day in Kosovo, Many Dead and Injured," ZERI, 18 March 2004.

²⁴ "Severe Violence in Metohija," KOHA DITORE, 18 March 2004.

Pejë/Peć municipality, was shot dead by UNMIK police as he was attempting to stab a Serb to death.

There were 34 of us men in the village on 17 March. We were having a meeting in the rectory in connection with moving into the houses. We had lunch and then toured the village to choose the best location for building another 15 houses. The Coordination Center had promised to support construction with aid in building materials. We had no idea what was going on in Mitrovica and other towns. It was about 3 p.m. when we saw some 200 to 300 people (...) We didn't know what it was all about. They were mostly young and kept chanting 'UÇK, UÇK.' They came up to the KFOR checkpoint manned by Italian soldiers, who didn't let them through. They stayed there for about 10 minutes, shouting insults at us and drawing their hands across their throats, miming how they were going to slaughter us. But KFOR managed to turn them back. Less than 10 minutes after that, we saw big groups of people coming from all sides, carrying Albanian flags. There was a young man with a bull horn who urged them to attack. There must have been between 4,000 and 5,000 of them. There was only one UNMIK police vehicle parked behind. There were two US police officers in it, a man and a woman. They told us to get into the rectory and wait until KFOR reinforcements arrived. We did as we were told and waited in the rectory, like lambs for the slaughter.

M.O. Serb from Belo Polje/Bellopojë
HLC interview on 4 June 2004

Belgrade media reported that several thousand Albanians threw stones and gasoline bombs at the rectory in which the Belo Polje/Bellopojë Serbs had taken shelter. As the Serbs were being evacuated, one of the demonstrators attacked Miladin Bačević with a knife and stabbed him several times. The UNMIK policewoman tried to stop the assailant and, when he would not desist, shot him dead.²⁵

15.1. Conduct of KFOR, UNMIK Police and KPS

KFOR and the UNMIK police were willing to help the Serbs but were too few in number to prevent the violence perpetrated by the Albanians. Some 20 KPS members on the scene did not even try to put up any resistance to the demonstrators. With their own bodies, Italian KFOR soldiers secured a narrow passage for the evacuation of the Serbs. Local Serbs have stated that the UNMIK policewoman saved the lives of the 34 Serbs who were in Belo Polje/Bellopojë at the time when she shot dead the demonstrator who was attacking Miladin Bačević. The injured Serbs were treated at the KFOR hospitals in Prizren and Pejë/Peć. A group of demonstrators who were in Pejë/Peć at the time of the assault on Belo Polje/Bellopojë tried to get through to Goraždevac/Gorazhdec, the largest Serb village in the municipality, but were turned back by members of the Spanish

²⁵ "Wounded in Body and Soul," VEČERNJE NOVOSTI, 2 April 2004.

contingent of KFOR at approximately 6 p.m., which marked the end of the demonstrations.²⁶

The KFOR soldiers couldn't stop them because they were coming from all sides. There were about 20 KPS members stationed a couple of dozen meters from the rectory, and only one UNMIK police vehicle parked behind it. There were two American police inside the vehicle, a man and a woman (...) At one point, I went to the front door of the rectory and called to the KPS to protect us. But they turned a deaf ear (...) The KFOR soldiers came to the rectory and stood in two lines. They had shields. They told us to go in single file through the 'tunnel' they had made with their bodies. The mob started throwing stones at us and the Italian soldiers. One of the Albanians had a knife with which he stabbed Miladin Bačević in the left shoulder and arm. Then I heard the shot. The mob pulled back a bit and we were evacuated. Twelve of us were injured, some badly, some lightly. Besides Miladin, Arandjel Arsenijević was also badly hurt - two of his ribs were broken (...) I heard later that, when she saw the Albanian stabbing Miladin, the American policewoman drew her gun and shot him. If she hadn't killed him, we wouldn't have gotten out of the village alive.

M.O. Serb from Belo Polje/Bellopojë
HLC interview on 4 June 2004

15.2. Aftermath

Serbs consider that Ali Laići/Ali Laiqi, the mayor of Pejë/Peć municipality, demonstrated his support for those who engaged in the violence by laying a wreath at the grave of the Albanian shot by the UNMIK policewoman. They add that the mayor never responded to their repeated calls to discuss the returned of the displaced. All the Serb returnees are now staying in the severely damaged rectory. They wish to remain in their village but do not believe that the Kosovo government truly wants to help them and create conditions for them to live on an equal footing with Albanians. Italian KFOR soldiers constantly patrol the village.

I hear they consider that Albanian as a hero. Even the Peć mayor went to his funeral. That's disgraceful. All our newly built houses were first looted and then burned down. The church was destroyed too. All the gravestones in the cemetery were overthrown. The substation was wrecked and we don't have electricity now. We use KFOR's generator (...) Albanians are still pasturing their livestock in our fields, and we sit around all day doing nothing. No one from the municipal authorities has been to see us. Only people like you come, to write up reports. But that doesn't help us any. Still, we all came back just the same. Up until 17 March, we believed that things would get better. We don't trust anyone now. We all live in the rectory, like in a refugee camp. We have covered the roof with tin and cardboard to stop the rain coming in. The municipality still hasn't started any

²⁶ "Bloody Day in Kosovo, Many Dead and Injured," ZERI, 18 March 2004.

reconstruction work. Twelve workman muck around one of the houses every day and they haven't even cleared the wreckage yet. Not even the foundations have been dug. Some building material was delivered but it isn't enough. I think they won't built anything for us. They are doing this only because of the elections. They don't want to include us Serbs in the clearing up. If they did, something would get done. Belo Polje got the worst of it and now everyone has forgotten about us. No one gives us any aid. The Albanians are working our fields and pasturing their animals on our land. We can't stop them. We live in a concentration camp. They even tore down our gravestones, and destroyed the church. They say we came back without an agreement and that this is the reason for what happened to us. How can I come back to my house and land sooner or later? What talks? We went to the Town Hall to talk with the mayor. We go in and Mayor Laiçi promptly leaves. If only they would give us 2,000 to 3,000 Euros per house, we would manage somehow. But nobody is giving us anything. All our papers were burned so that we can't prove what kind of houses we had. I must say that some Albanians come to see us, but only in secret, never with anybody else because they are afraid of something bad happening to them. So, when they go through the village with other Albanians, they ignore us. But we are determined and will celebrate the anniversary of our return on 14 July. It will be the village feast day. We don't know how long we will be able to stick it out. If things stay the way they are now, then we will go to some other country, for sure. All we want is for someone to tell us something, anything, openly.

M.O. Serb from Belo Polje/Bellopojë
HLC interview on 4 June 2004

16. The demonstrators are dispersed in Kamenicë/Kamenica

The incidents in the municipality of Kamenicë/Kamenica started on 17 March 2004 with a peaceful demonstration in which the municipal mayor also took part. Following the reports about clashes in Mitrovicë/Mitrovica, a group of Albanians who had come from other places in Kosovo, started chanting against Kamenicë/Kamenica. Around 14:00 the protest became violent. In the centre of the town the Albanians torched Serb cars and broke windows of Serb shops. After that they headed for the streets with Serb houses. The material damage was not significant because KFOR and UNMIK police dispersed the demonstrators. Bursts of fire from automatic weapons were also opened on those houses. Some Serbs sustained severe bodily injuries. Two churches, in Donja Slapašnica/Sllapashnicë të Poshtme and Talinovci/Talinovc, were destroyed in that municipality. On 18 March the demonstrations were of a lesser intensity because KFOR was better organised and managed to prevent excessive violence. The Serbs affirm that at the time of the attack neither fixed nor mobile telephone links worked so that they could not call for help.

The rally started at noon on 17 March in the centre of the town. (...) Over 1000 people attended it. The speaker was the municipal mayor Shaip Surdulli and other municipal officials followed. (...) However, people started interrupting them with slogans. They had probably learned of riots in Mitrovica and other places in Kosovo. Men who were not scheduled to deliver any speeches began to climb the dais. People shouted "Kamenica traitor" which was presumably to mean that there should be violence in Kamenica too.

Some of the demonstrators even threw various objects at the mayor. There were outsiders among the participants of the rally. (...) The majority were young, about the age of secondary school pupils (...) Around 14:00 the rally acquired a different dimension. The crowd (...) started towards the part of the town where there were more Serb houses. In view of the number of people present, the UNMIK police were powerless. Together with KFOR they managed to block the access to one of the Serb streets. The mob then veered off to another street also with some Serb houses. The crowd hurled stones at those houses and broke almost all the windows (...) Yugoslav Kostić from the village of Rečane had driven his wife to work. His wife works for the KPS. On his way back he ran into the crowd. The demonstrators pulled him out of the car, beat him and left him lying on the ground. Journalists from our radio, Albanians, were following the crowd and reported the case to the UNMIK police. The police came and took him to the hospital. Yugoslav suffered serious bodily injuries. His bones were broken. They broke his jaw too. I don't know if he has come out of the hospital yet but I think that he will never recover fully again. In the evening KFOR broke up the crowd but smaller groups continued their actions round the outskirts. The same thing happened on 18 March. (...) KFOR proved more efficient the second day however.

Lj.D. Serb man from Kamenicë/Kamenica, manager of a multiethnic radio station
HLC interview, 24 June 2004

We were attacked with a burst of fire at the house, Vuka Karadžica Street 211 on 18 March. There are five more Serb houses on our street. We heard that in the centre of the town a number of cars and windows had been smashed that day (...) The attack started around half past seven while I was in the hallway. Something shook the house, there was a burst of fire from an automatic weapon. The windowpanes were shattered. There was smoke. The telephones were out of order, even 044, the Kosovo mobile. The house was surrounded because later on, when I had gone to the cellar, I saw two men at the door. There was noise in the street. I saw a group, which was joined by our attackers. The telephones were back in order later.

B.N. Serb woman from Kamenicë/Kamenica
HLC interview, 24 March 2004

16.1. Conduct of KFOR, UNMIK police and KPS

KFOR was properly organised on 18 March and scattered the demonstrators attacking Serb houses. KPS and UNMIK police patrols were few in number, there was no command and they acted more like observers.

The behaviour of the KPS was objectionable both the first and the second day. They were just onlookers. Nobody saw Serb policemen in the streets. On the second day (18 March) KFOR showed more efficiency and so the demonstrators threw various objects at the soldiers. Some KFOR members were injured too. In some cases they had to withdraw.

Lj.D. Serb man from Kamenicë/Kamenica, manager of a multiethnic radio station
HLC interview, 24 June 2004

An hour later two international policemen arrived and a Serb policemen with them. We did not trust them and did not leave the cellar. They conducted the investigation. They could not protect us, as there were only three patrols for the whole Kamenica area. After they left, around 23:00, we called a friend in Ropotovo, Gradimir Nikić, a representative of the Kamenica municipality responsible for town planning. It was he or maybe the UNMIK police who sent three KFOR vehicles. Only then did we come out of the cellar. One could see the trail the attackers had left behind. They had come through the gardens of the Serb houses. I was at the end of my tether and so we asked to be transferred to Serbia (...) Some Albanian friends offered to get us out but KFOR wouldn't let them. In my opinion Ivan Stanojević, the Serb representative and Nebojša Savić, the director of the local office did nothing to advise people what to do.

B.N. Serb woman from Kamenicë/Kamenica who hid in the cellar

HLC interview, 24 March 2004

16.2. Aftermath

In the early morning hours of March 19 the Serbs left the town. They returned a few days later. Their Albanian neighbours lent them support. Serb journalists blame Kosovo media for inciting Albanians to rally and commit violence against the Serbs.

In my view Kosovo media played a very negative role in the March events. In a manner of speaking they invited people to come out. Such inference could be drawn from the way in which they reported about the incidents. In the morning of 19 March the Serbs started leaving the town. Escorted by UNMIK and KPS some took their cars in the direction of Serbia and others headed for Serb villages in our municipality. I was one of the latter. It was only three or four days later that the Serbs started returning to their homes. During that time their houses were not looted or damaged in any major way. I am confident that Kamenica townspeople did not take part in the violence. My Albanian neighbours said to me: "Ljuba, mind your step for two or three days until this horror is over". I am still on good terms with everybody and I work normally just as before. Incidentally, a commission has come out to assess the damage. I don't know what their assessment is but from what I hear it is less than in any other place where there was violence.

Lj.D. Serb man from Kamenicë/Kamenica, manager of a multiethnic radio station

HLC interview, 24 June 2004

17. Three incidents in the municipality of Novo Brdo/Novobërdë

In the municipality of Novo Brdo/Novobërdë things started happening on 16 March 2004 when in front of the village hall in Bostane/Bostan Albanians protested against the arrest of KLA members. These demonstrations were peaceful. Nonetheless, during the night of 17/18 March there were three attacks: a Molotov cocktail was thrown into the village hall in the village of Bostane/Bostan; a grenade was thrown at the flat of the municipal mayor Petar Vasić in the locality of Stara Kolonija/Kolonia e Vjetër in Novo Brdo/Novobërdë

town, and in the village of Klobukar/Kllobukar the rebuilt house of Sava Zdravković, a refugee about to return home, was torched. Considerable material damage was caused in these attacks. No incidents were recorded in mixed Serb-Albanian villages.

During the night of 17/18 March a Molotov cocktail was thrown into the village hall here, in the village of Bostane. Two offices burned down, the furniture, computers and all the rest that was in those offices. It happened half an hour after midnight. The village hall had its guards but they did not hear anything. It was only after they noticed smoke that they reacted. The police came out to investigate the site. They say that the investigation is under way (...) A commission for the assessment of damage came from Priština, but I don't know what their assessment is (...) That evening I had a premonition, that's why I didn't go to the flat. I stayed with some acquaintances in the village. Some time around 02:30 a grenade was thrown at my flat in the locality of Stara Kolonija. The Albanian neighbours did not see anyone. Fortunately, the flat did not catch fire, but everything inside is broken. That same night Sava Zdravković's house was torched. He's from the village of Klobukar, the house had just been finished and he was expected to return home that day.

P.V. Serb man from Novo Brdo/Novobërdë, municipal mayor
HLC interview, 20 April 2004

17.1. Conduct of KFOR, UNMIK police and KPS

On 17 and 18 March the KPS and KFOR responded vigorously in Novo Brdo/Novobërdë. The patrols were strengthened and the curfew was imposed. However, during the curfew in the village of Izvor Albanians beat up a Serb who would not let them cultivate his land.

After these events the police [KPS] and KFOR strengthened their guards. The curfew remained in force for ten days. Nonetheless, there was an incident in the village of Izvor. In the locality of Svračak the Albanians beat up a Serb. He was beaten because he had told them not to plough his field. The case was reported to the police, the culprits are known and they were detained but were released as soon as they made their statements.

P.V. Serb man from Novo Brdo/Novobërdë, municipal mayor
HLC interview, 20 April 2004

17.2 Aftermath

The upshot of the March events was that the Serbs, who had informed the municipal authorities about their return, did not come back. The municipal administration does not function as it did before, primarily because a certain number of Albanian employees do not come to work.

[The torching of the house in the village of Klobukar] made other displaced persons decide not to return. They call me from Serbia now and ask me: "Hey, Mayor, you told us

everything was fine in Novo Brdo, didn't you?" I don't know what to tell them (...) I am also concerned about the conduct of some Albanian employees here in the municipal hall. They don't turn up at their work places regularly and some won't even call. Some won't even speak in Serbian. I always avoid the recourse to disciplinary measures because it will further broaden the gap between the Serbs and the Albanians.

P.V. Serb man from Novo Brdo/Novobërdë, municipal mayor
HLC interview, 20 April 2004.

18. Beatings in Rrahovec/Orahovac

During the demonstrations in the centre of Rrahovec/Orahovac on 17 March a group entered the Serb locality and beat up several Serbs living in houses near the Albanian neighbourhood. The access to the Serb locality was not guarded at the time of the demonstrations so that the attackers could enter the Serb houses freely. In the centre of town the demonstrators demolished the Church of Holy Sunday. The attacked Serbs recognised two of the four attackers. Gazmend Shala/Gazmend Šalja, an Albanian, was killed during the riots in the town.

My husband and I went out on the balcony to see what was going on. We heard noise. I concluded from the voices that a multitude had gathered in the centre and from shouts 'KLA, KLA', that it was something serious (...) Big commotion then started in front of our house. One of them was holding high the Albanian flag (...) Some of the demonstrators started pulling stones from the road and hurling them at the neighbouring empty Serb houses (...) We couldn't go anywhere since the demonstrators were right in front of our house (...) We fled inside and hid behind the kitchen stove. We heard the shattering of glass and steps up the stairs (...) They broke the door and four young men entered the room. I recognised two of them because I used to see them in Orahovac often but I don't know their names (...) I have never seen the other two in Orahovac. First they cursed us. Then they started beating us with poles, fists and feet. I was holding a leather bag in my hand, with the passport, my ID card, the health care card and 500 Euro. They snatched the bag from my hand, then caught me by the hair and pushed me down the stairs. I suffered injuries to both my legs, the spine, a hip, the chest and head. They beat even more brutally my husband Staniša, on the head and body. He had an open wound on his head for a long time. His left leg was injured the worst and he cannot walk now. When the attacks ended, a member of the UNMIK police came and brought along KPS policemen. They took us to Violeta Krstić's house. The next day they transferred us to the surgery in Orahovac. People there were nice to us. Dr Jusuf Korenica who attended to our injuries, said: "I am sorry, how ever did they pick you out of all people." Dr Agim was nice to us too. Their faces showed that they were really sorry. From Orahovac they transferred us to Mitrovica. Staniša spent 8 days in the intensive care. His gall bladder was operated and now he's bed-ridden (...) The house owner wants us to pay the rent and we don't have the wherewithal as we're on welfare, we get 50 Euro. Nobody helps us and nobody comes to see us. All I want is to have peace and security again, time will solve the rest.

R.G. Serb woman from Rrahovec/Orahovac, beaten on 17 March
HLC interview, 14 May 2004

19. Cleansing of Prizren

The Serbs who had stayed in Prizren after June 1999, some 100 of them, could move about freely and perform their daily chores without fear of something untoward happening to them. They took occasional provocations, such as dirty language directed at them in the street, as an aftermath of the war. They felt safe and accepted among the local Albanians, Turks and Bosniaks. Miloš Nekić was an exception. All his pre-war Serb neighbours had moved away under pressure. Some of them sold their houses whilst the houses of others were torched after their departure. In August 1999 Miloš Nekić stopped coming out of the house fearing that the criminals might seize the occasion and torch his house.

The Albanians interviewed by the HLC are convinced that no local Albanians had a hand in the March violence and the rioters were people brought from elsewhere by the organisers of the demonstrations.

The thugs were organised and knew exactly which houses were Serb and which of them should be demolished and torched. There were also those who came in trucks to plunder. I did not recognise any one of them. They were not from Prizren (...) I have never seen those people before (...) We have always been on good terms with the Serbs. They respected us and we respected them. They spoke our language, respected our customs. At the time of Ramadan the Serbs refrained from smoking in front of the fasting Albanians, Bosniacs or Turks.

G.I. Albanian man from Prizren
HLC interview, 19 May 2004

I live alone in my flat which is next to the 17 November School (...) I did not want to leave Prizren because this is my town, this is where I was born, this is where I grew up. When the war ended, we the Serbs who had stayed on were subjected to all sorts of trouble. I was even detained by the KLA in June 1999. In spite of that horrible experience I stayed in Prizren. Of late I was moving freely about town. There would always be somebody there to insult me but I paid no attention. The children in the neighbourhood liked me and never failed to greet me.

E.Đ. Serb woman from Prizren, put up in the German KFOR base
HLC interview, 24 April 2004

Our house in the locality of Lakurić was surrounded from all sides by Albanians with whom my family has always maintained good relations (...) We were educators, my late husband Mile and I, we taught children for 40 years and we were always respected in this town.

D.D. Serb woman from the locality of Lakurić/Lakuriq in Prizren, retired teacher
HLC interview, 25 April 2004

The violence that escalated that day caught me unawares as the interethnic tension in Prizren was the lowest of all the places in Kosovo. That is why I returned and brought

back my family. I moved about freely and socialised with Albanians, Turks and Bosniaks without any trouble.

Lj.P. Serb returnee, put up in the German KFOR base
HLC interview, 30 April 2004

My wife and I did not leave Prizren. We could move about freely more or less freely. (...) We were on very good terms with our neighbours, Sala, an Albanian family, with brothers Thaqi, Enver and Asaf. Their father Halil was a good man. Ruzhdi, who owns the household appliances shop, likewise. We wouldn't exchange them for half of Serbia. Although there were some minor provocations (...) we were determined to stay here, in our home, in the centre of Prizren near the Church of the Holy Virgin of Ljeviška where there were few Serb families.

S.R. Serb man from the centre of Prizren, put up in the German KFOR base
HLC interview, 28 April 2004

19.1 The chronology of events

In the afternoon of 16 March the three associations emerged from the KLA: the KLA Veterans' Association, the KLA Invalids' Association and the Association of KLA Heroes' Families, organised a rally on the central Šadrvan/Shadërvan Square in protest against the arrest of the former KLA commanders, accused of war and other crimes during and after the war in Kosovo, the enforcement of Serbian laws in Kosovo and the UNMIK policy towards the former KLA members. That evening Kosovo media reported that three boys had drowned in the Ibar fleeing from Serbs. On 17 March a crowd started to gather in the centre of Prizren. It was made mostly of young people who had arrived in buses and were shouting slogans "Mitrovicë, Mitrovicë", "UÇK, UÇK".

At noon on Tuesday [16 March] protests were organised on the Shadërvan Square in Prizren under the logo 'All in the Defence of the Liberators of Kosovo'. Several hundred participants held photographs of UÇK commanders, slogans against the UNMIK and the enforcement of Serbian laws in Kosovo. They were demanding 'to end the UNMIK policy directed against UÇK combatants' (...) The news programmes of RTK, TV 21, KTV and local TV stations Besa and TV Prizren were dominated by reports and special broadcasts from Mitrovicë about the three boys, victims of a Serb attack near the village of Çabrë. There were also reports about the blockade of the highway near the village of Çagllavicë. (...) I sensed that it would not end well. (...) The next day, 17 March, some time around 10 o'clock I went to the market. I saw that there were more people in the streets than usual. I thought 'it's a market day so that's why'. However, later on, in the afternoon, Prizren was caught up in an unheard of wave of violence (...) Several hundred, mostly young people, gathered in the centre of the town between the Theranda and Tirana hotels and the bridge. The demonstrators circulated around the town and shouted slogans: "UÇK, UÇK, and "Mitrovicë, Mitrovicë" waving Albanian flags. A vehicle with a loudspeaker circulated the town inviting people to join the demonstrations. After a while the violence reached its peak. (...) And then all Orthodox objects were attacked (...), Serb houses in the locality of Nënkalaja (...) and other Serb objects.

Albanian man from Prizren who wanted to remain anonymous
HLC interview, 27 April 2004

The Serbs were caught by surprise. Some tried to defend their houses and stay in them. There are examples of Albanians who tried to prevent the destruction of Serb houses and help the Serbs. The majority, nonetheless, simply looked on.

At 18:30 on 17 March I heard loud banging (...) I heard axes banging on the gate. I called the KPS. They told me to withdraw to the back of the yard and hide there. I stayed to support the gate. Some 5 or 6 policemen came and told me through the gate to come out. I said I would not leave my home. Then they started breaking the door with their feet. I was still supporting the door. Then a policeman climbed the fence, pulled out the bolt I use to lock the gate and jumped over to my side. He said they could not hold back the crowd. The attackers tried to hurt me in front of the police. The police placed a wooden board towards the next-door house, took me across, then onto the roof of another house and we alighted on the street running parallel with the river. They called a taxi since they were afraid that the attackers might attack the police car. They took me to the police station. That same night they took us to the German KFOR base.

M.N. Serb man from Prizren who did not want to leave his house
HLC interview, 26 April 2004



Serb houses burned by Albanians; photo taken in Prizren © HLC

Just as I thought that it was over and that there would be no more violence, some time around 10 o'clock [18 March] I heard loud noise, the crowd had gathered again. They were all running towards Potkaljaja (...) A group, some 20-30 strong, entered professor Vekoslav Stanković's house (...), which was abandoned. Then fire broke out at the back

of that house. I picked up a rubber hose immediately and tried to put it out. They prevented me, they didn't even let me come near. Several of them started torching [Adem] Demaqi's house. I showed them Demaqi's pictures and told them it was his house and that there was an Albanian flag on it. Some of them retreated immediately, but a couple of them started swearing and saying: "Edhe ai eshte si Shkau (Shkije), eshte maxhup' (He's like Škije, he's a Gypsy). They were bent on torching it like all the other houses (...) I got a big knife and a metal rod and warned them off. They said: "Run, this old man's crazy!" (...) I continued (...) putting the fire out in other houses. Madžun, the errand boy in the musical school, who lives with his family in an abandoned Serb house in Potkaljaja, came to lend me a hand. Had it not been for us, my guess is that all the surrounding houses would have burned down.

G.I. Albanian man from Prizren, locality of Nënkalaja/Potkaljaja
HLC interview, 19 May 2004



Burned Serb houses; photo taken in Prizren © HLC

After they had set on fire all the churches in the town and some houses on the previous day, 17 March, the next day, 18 March, they torched the Serb houses in the locality of Potkaljaja. We still did not want to leave the house (...) We did not fear our Albanian, Turkish or Gorani neighbours (...) We expected them to stop the attackers. However, on 19 March, we were attacked nevertheless. Nobody tried to stop the hooligans. Only a

young woman from our street, I don't know her name, told my mother: "Auntie, run, come to us".

M.S. Serb woman, thrown out of her house on 19 March
HLC interview, 5 June 2004

19.2. Attack on the Serbs, their property and religious objects

The demonstrators beat Serbs as they expelled them. There were cases of Albanians helping the Serbs, dressing their wounds, taking them off the street and hiding them in their houses. All Serb houses and religious objects were completely or partly destroyed and plundered. Even some Albanian houses in Serb neighbourhoods were seriously damaged and looted. On 1 April the Municipal Assembly of Prizren published the information about the material damage caused during the March riots.

I've been to many countries and seen a lot. But what I saw during the violent demonstrations on the 17th and 18th of March in Prizren, I have not seen anywhere else. I could not even assume that something like that could happen. The violence escaped any control. Groups of young Albanians were destroying and burning everything in their way.

Albanian man from Prizren, locality of Nënkalaja/Potkaljaja
HLC interview, 19 May 2004



Serb houses burned by Albanians; photo taken in Prizren © HLC

19.2.1 Beatings

At least 10 Serbs, mostly elderly, were beaten when Albanian demonstrators broke into their houses in the localities of Nënkalaja/Potkaljaja and Lakurić/Lakuriq. Several women were among the injured.

I am sorry for those children (...) because I saw all this incomprehensible hatred on their young faces. Not less than 30 of them entered our house (...) They broke the front door with violent kicks and blunt objects. Several very sturdy young men started toward me. I tried to ask them calmly why they were doing it. Instead of getting an answer I was kicked in the chest. (...) This was followed by blows all over my body (...) At some point they told me to go out. I did not want to leave the house (...) I resisted them and was struck once again so I started crying and calling for help. They did not stop and instead kept saying: "Shut up or we'll slit your throat! This is KLA". I put my head down and expected the worst. They hurt me very badly (...) My left eye is black, swollen and closed. Look, they've broken my teeth. My leg was in a cast. I had to spend three weeks under constant medical control. I have to sustain myself with medicines.

D.D. Serb woman from Prizren, locality of Lakurić/Lakuriq, retired teacher

HLC interview, 25 April, 2004

To be on the safe side, we had put a metal rod across the door and they could not open it. They entered through the window, which they broke. My wife and I retreated to the corner of the room. I thought that was the end of us. Their faces showed terrible hatred and rage. They broke everything. They beat me with poles, feet and fists. Slobodanka was left alone. She begged them not to beat me and told them in Albanian that I was a sick man. A young man ordered them in Albanian "Stop it!" ('Mosni bol mo')

S.R. Serb man whose house was next to the Church of the Holy Virgin of Ljeviška

HLC interview, 28 April 2004.

They broke the gate and threw it into the river. Then they entered (the Seminary). They went to the first floor first. There they beat Zeqir Morina, broke his arm and then threw out both him and his wife. Dragan Nedeljković also lived on the first floor. I don't know if they beat him or not but I do know that he was burnt in his room (...) Then they came to the second floor and started breaking our door. There were four of us, four women, there. Natalija, my daughter Tanja, aunt Draga and I. They started swearing and yelling: "Get out!" They asked me in Serbian if there were any men there. I told them there weren't, I was lying because I did not want anything to happen to Ljuba who was on the third floor with his family (...) As we started to move, they began to beat us. At some point I was hit on the head with some sharp, hard object. I started bleeding. (...) In all that chaos my daughter disappeared. I found out later on that she had mingled with the crowd and thus got away. Natalija, Draga and I started down the right side, by the river. The demonstrators threw stones at us. I don't remember how I got separated from Natalija and Draga. All I know is that all of a sudden they were not there. With injuries and all, I was on my own and the night had already begun to fall.

O.F. Serb woman, lived with her daughter in the Seminary

HLC interview, 27 April 2004



Serb houses burned by Albanians; photo taken in Prizren © HLC

In her interview with the HLC this Prizren woman who had lived with her daughter in the Seminary since June 1999 says that she was helped by an unknown Albanian man who saw her in the street:

At some point an Albanian approached me and told me to look for shelter. I told him that an old woman and a woman who had been with me had got lost. He told me not to worry because they had been taken to a safe place. I did not know that man. At that moment my daughter Tanja turned up and immediately after her the ambulance arrived (...) They started to dress my wound and took us to the hospital. (...) As for grandma Natalija and aunt Draga, some Albanians had taken them to a cellar of a house, gave them food and dressed their wounds. Then those people took them to the village of Sredska where Serbs live and turned them over to KFOR.

O.F. Serb woman, lived with her daughter in the Seminary

HLC interview, 27 April 2004

In addition to these cases, during the torching of the houses in Nënkalaja/Potkaljaja on the 17th and 18th of March, the demonstrators severely beat the spouses Jeftić, Zagorka Repić and Lepka Pitović. According to the Serbs in the German KFOR base, they left Prizren and are in Serbia.

19.2.2 Solidarity

There were many people beneath the windows. They started breaking the front door of the Seminary. (...) I told my wife: "Run!" (...) Then everything in all the objects was broken (...) Our only chance of escape was a window 30x30 through which one could reach the terrace of the next-door house (...) That little window saved my family. I first pushed my wife through that window, and then my daughter and my son. I could not get through it because I'm enormously fat. I thought to myself 'I've stayed here, I'll burn here' (...) Then I remembered a small window in the toilet through which one could reach the terrace of the next-door house. That window had to be widened so that I could get through it. I went to the kitchen, lifted the refrigerator and with it I started breaking the wall next to the window to make a larger hole and get out. I had blocked the front door with a bench and some other objects. The demonstrators tried to open the door with some blunt objects. They gave up probably because the fire was spreading (...) I succeeded after several blows and made it to the terrace of the next-door house before the whole building went up in flames.

Lj.P. Serb man from Prizren, returnee, lived in the Seminary
HLC interview, 30 April 2004

In his statement to the HLC this returnee to Prizren also said that an Albanian man helped him in that crisis:

The owner of that house accepted us as friends. He offered us tea, told us not to worry (...) To spare him trouble he might run into for having taken us in, I took the children and we went to the Theranda Hotel (...) We didn't stay there long as I was afraid that we might have been seen. I broke the window and we came out near the building of Tekke where there were two large dustbins. We got into them. My son started crying and I covered his mouth so that he couldn't be heard. My daughter (...) was quiet although she was terrified. We were barefoot, with no clothes, hungry. Some time around 3 o'clock in the morning the situation calmed down but I was still not sure if it would be safe to leave that place (...) It was only around 5 o'clock that we decided to come out and headed for the building of the UNMIK regional centre.

Lj.P. Serb man from Prizren, returnee, lived in the Seminary
HLC interview, 30 April 2004

First they stoned us and then threw a Molotov cocktail into the yard. Fortunately we were not hurt. We did not suffer any major damage except material (...) The hooligans were breaking everything around them. All four of us entered an outhouse behind the house and barricaded ourselves in with boards. It was getting dark and that gave us hope that we wouldn't be discovered. The front door of the house was broken in no time. We heard loud banging but they did not find us. We stayed there until eight o'clock that evening. As we could not hear the noise any more, we decided to flee to the forest. When we came out, we saw that everything was broken and that some things had been plundered. We

took blankets and some tins and set off. We stayed in the forest until one o'clock in the morning (...) Then we decided to go down towards Šadrvan come what may.

M.S. Serb woman from Prizren, put up in the German KFOR base
HLC interview, 27 April 2004

In the centre of Prizren unknown Albanians helped the witness and other women from Nënkalaja/Potkaljaja who were with her to find shelter:

And so we reached the musical school and came across four men there. We thought that was the end of us but we were in luck, they happened to be our Albanian neighbours. (...) They took us to their house and there we stayed until the morning (...) The daughter of one of the Albanians knew somebody in KFOR and let that person know that we needed help. It was only as late as half past eight that evening, when all the Serb houses in Potkaljaja were on fire, that two KFOR vehicles with four soldiers came and brought us here to the barracks.

M.S. Serb woman from Prizren, put up in the German KFOR base
HLC interview, 27 April 2004

19.2.3 The attackers are recognised

From the terrace I saw seven unknown men who were circling around the school. At 14:10 the bell on my door rang for the first time. I did not open. (...) They came back 20 minutes later (...) I recognised their voices as the voices of the men who had usurped a Serb flat on the fourth floor of this building. From the terrace I saw an Albanian whose name is Shasivar and who has a grey Mercedes. In 1999 it was in that Mercedes that he took away things he had looted from Serb flats. The first attempt to break my door happened at 15:30. They were back an hour later. I don't know what they hit it with but (...) the door stuck after that blow. At the same time a group of young men gathered behind the building (...) One of them said to me: "Come down". A group started towards the entrance of the building, to try to break the door, I suppose. That was their last attempt (...) the police arrived at the last moment.

E.D. Serb woman from Prizren
HLC interview, 27 April 2004

19.2.4 Official record of houses destroyed on 17-19 March

According to the findings of the Damage Assessment Commission of the Prizren Municipality, 51 houses were torched and 4 demolished. The Commission assessed the damage at 825,180 Euro.

In the locality of Nënkalaja/Potkaljaja the torched houses belonged to: Blagoje Jeftić, Ilija Stavretović, Vekoslav Karajelić, Luka Tunić, Zvonimir Rakić, Zlata Vasiljević, Danica Nedeljković, Spasa Mojsić, Dimitrije Stojković, Danica Dišljenković, Svetlana Kokanović, Pita Pitović, Moma Pavićević, Rista Tasić, Borka Veselinović, Toma

Vasiljević, Spasa Mihailović, Krsta Ljakić, Danica Mihailović, Leposava Ćosić, Stojan Stojanović. Krsta Zarić, Milan Vukadinović, Bojadiu Bedri, Krunislav Mondusić, Božana Đurđević, Dimko Dimkić, Spasa Dinetović, Djona Dodaj, Petar Nedeljković, Dedo Kacinari, Krsta Zarić.

The commission was unable to establish the names of 28 house owners in the locality of Nënkalaja/Podkaljaja. In other parts of the town three more houses were torched in Zehar Pajaziti Street and Miloš Nekić's house in Ismet Jashari-Kumanova Street was completely destroyed.

19.3 The destruction of religious objects

We have gone through horrible things during the last five years. No sooner did the Serbian police and military withdraw than our monk, Father Hariton was killed. His body was found beheaded in the Prizren locality of Tuzsus (...) For full five years we could not put a foot outside the monastery walls without KFOR escort. The cleansing of the remaining Serbs in Kosovo started on 17 and 18 March. After they torched and demolished all Serb Orthodox churches and objects and a large number of Serb houses, the crowd headed on foot from Prizren towards the Monastery of Holy Archangels. The Albanians who participated in the attack on the monastery that evening were mostly young. KFOR members stated that they were about 400 strong but I think there were twice as many.

Monk from the Monastery of Holy Archangels
HLC interview, 26 May 2004

In its report the Commission notes that 8 religious objects were damaged; of them 3 were destroyed completely and 3 in part. The Holy Virgin of Ljeviška from the 13th century is completely destroyed and plundered; the monastery of Holy Archangels from the 14th century is completely destroyed (the residence and everything in it burned down); the church of the Holy Sunday from the 14th century is damaged; the Church of the Holy Healers from the 14th century is demolished; the Church of St George-Runovica from the 15th century and the Church of the Synod of Saint George are severely damaged; the Church of Holy Salvation is slightly damaged; the Church of Holy Sunday in the village of Živiniane/Zhivinjac was mined (only the belfry remains) and the building of the Cyril and Methodius Seminary with all the auxiliary buildings (seminary, boarding school, refectory etc.) burned to the ground. The books, documents and objects in that building were either plundered or burned. The Administrative building is somewhat less damaged.²⁷

19.4. Conduct of KFOR, UNMIK police and KPS

KFOR posts in front of the Serb houses were either abandoned or the KFOR troops abandoned them when the demonstrators headed for them. The KPS did not respond to the Serb calls. Even when they tried to establish order the KPS failed, primarily because

²⁷ Report of the Municipal Damage Assessment Commission, 3 April 2004.

of their small strength. There were cases when UNMIK police retreated before the demonstrators, leaving them their official batons and shields which the demonstrators then used to attack the Serbs. KFOR and KPS did evacuate the Serbs but did not try to stop the demonstrators or protect the Serb property. In some instances KPS members joined in the violence against the Serbs. Other agencies, such as the Fire Department, did not react either in conformity with their rules of service.

I saw a group of young men break the front door of the Seminary and go in (...) Then they put fire to it. I did not see if there were any Serbs inside the Seminary. Nobody intervened then nor tried to prevent the violence. The firemen arrived only after the raging fire had spread to all Seminary buildings threatening to engulf the neighbouring houses next. However, they were not only prevented from acting but were also stoned. A group of young men seized their vehicle and started down the street towards the building of the UNMIK regional centre. Shots could be heard at the same time. The police of the special Argentine unit started from the direction of the UNMIK building. They tried to disperse the demonstrators with tear gas but the mob attacked them. The demonstrators had stones, poles and stone cubes in their hands (...) The police retreated towards the UNMIK building. Some policemen were injured and they put down their shields and truncheons and the demonstrators picked them up. I could not see how many policemen there were but it is obvious that there weren't enough (...) The demonstrators broke almost all the windows on the front side of the UNMIK regional centre.

Albanian man from Prizren who wanted to remain anonymous

HLC interview, 27 April 2004

KFOR soldiers until recently guarded this object [the Church of the Holy Virgin of Ljeviška] and they had their post in the immediate vicinity of the church. At the time of the attack there were no KFOR soldiers anywhere near the church.²⁸

Several of them [demonstrators] approached German KFOR soldiers with a white flag and talked with them about something. Then the mob started torching the monastery. (...) We were transferred to an articulated vehicle with caterpillars (...) We reached the highway by a secondary road. The German soldiers brought us to their base.

Monk from the Monastery of Holy Archangels

HLC interview, 26 May 2004

Vandalism, wreckage, the din started, and then smoke began to come out of the Seminary building. I expected somebody to come and stop it but nobody turned up. Neither the police nor KFOR troops (...) I phoned my son Mile who was in Štrpce and told him what was happening. (...) The police from Štrpce called (...) They asked me about the number of people who were destroying and burning the Seminary. I begged them to do something (...) The police from Štrpce called again. They told us they had spoken to the police in Prizren and had been told that KFOR and UNMIK police were by the musical school, at the bottom of Potkaljaja and that they would protect us. I went to the window and looked

²⁸ *Ibidem*

in the direction of the musical school. I did not see either the police or KFOR troops but I did see that the Church of the Holy Salvation was on fire. On the opposite side the Church of the Holy Sunday was on fire too, about 100 metres from my house.

S.N. Serb woman returnee to Prizren, locality of Nënkalaja/Potkalaja
HLC interview, 27 April 2004

I called the police but unlike on previous occasions, nobody answered (...) When [the attackers] stopped beating me, they went down to the cellar and shortly left our house. After that five policemen came. Four of them were Albanians and one spoke English. They told us we had to go. My wife wanted to return and get a bag with documents and 2000 Euro, which we were saving for our old age and burial but they would not let her go back. I tried too but a policeman [KPS] kicked my behind. He dealt me several powerful kicks. I was in severe pain. Two of them put helmets on our heads and pushed us by force outside towards their car.

S.R. Serb man whose house was next to the Church of the Holy Virgin of Ljeviška
HLC interview, 28 April 2004

[The demonstrators] first entered the yard and then the house even though there was a KFOR plaque saying: 'This house is under KFOR protection - Stop' but KFOR did not protect us. KFOR and the police had given us telephone numbers to call them whenever we needed something. On earlier occasions they always responded but not this time (...) Nobody lifted the receiver. The police arrived late after everything had been looted and broken and only to evacuate me or, better said, to take me out of my house by force.

D.D. Serb woman from Prizren, locality of Lakurić/Lakuriq, retired teacher
HLC interview, 25 April 2004

I called the police through a friend in OSCE. He's Greek (...) I asked him to give me the names of the policemen who would come to fetch me because I could trust no one (...) Less than ten minutes later the police were there. When the police arrived those young men [demonstrators] were in front of my door. When the police opened, I saw two young men with their hands up and facing the wall. A policeman pulled the door of the apartment so that I could not see those two young men on the staircase. I don't know what happened to them, whether they were detained or let go. The policemen told me I had enough time to get ready. They took me away from the flat around 18:00. They locked my door and we went to the police station. Shortly after that they took me to the German KFOR base. The policemen treated me very well. I think that one of the policemen who came into my flat, Naser is his name, knows who those young men were. From what I heard, my flat was looted later nonetheless.

E.Dj. Serb woman in Prizren, put up in the German KFOR base
HLC interview, 24 April 2004

19.5 Aftermath

The remaining Serbs, accommodated in the German KFOR base, some 30 of them, were at first determined to leave Kosovo and seek material compensation. Some of them did leave. Three months later, those who want to stay prevail provided their houses are rebuilt. Some Albanians think that the March violence is an infamous act against the helpless and that a small number of neighbours ventured to help those in danger. Those who claim to be the protectors of the Albanian interests, such as the ANA (Albanian National Army) let it be known that they will fight against the injustice imposed by the UNMIK and for the freedom of the Albanian people, regardless of the price.

The Seminary was my only home. I lived modestly. Since the war I have managed to save 2,300 Euro. All this has burned. I don't know what will happen to us. We were all people who had nothing. On whose toes did we tread?

O.F. Serb woman, accommodated in the German KFOR base
HLC interview, 27 April 2004

It is evident that it was all well organised. Somebody paid a bribe for it. All Orthodox objects were attacked. If it was not organised, how could only Serb houses go on fire, and the Albanian houses, between them, remain untouched. For instance, the Seminary was torched, and the Albanian buildings around it were unscathed (...) All they did hurt us the Albanians the most. Now much more time will be needed to restore confidence

H.M. Albanian man from Prizren
HLC interview, 27 March 2004

We hoped that our children would return and that life would be better. However, that day our neighbours did not play fair, they did not help us. Maybe they did not dare (...) There were many people in the street. They [KPS] and our neighbours included, watched the Holy Virgin of Ljeviška burn. As we were entering the car my wife told our neighbours 'Shame on you for allowing this to happen'. Nobody said a word.

S.R. Serb man from the centre of Prizren
HLC interview, 28 April 2004

The conduct of those hooligans and criminals disgraced us all. A lot of time will now be needed to regain the lost confidence (...) When I talked to my sons, Armen, who is in Germany, and Armin, who is in Sarajevo, after the March violence, they said to me: "Dad, we're not coming back to Prizren"! And why should they?

G.I. Albanian man from Prizren
HLC interview, 19 May 2004

My house was built before World War II. I want the same house (...) The put fire to the house, levelled the ground and now it looks as if there's never been a house there, as if I never existed. And that is not true. I want my house (...) Everybody has the right to what

is his. My soul is in that house. My parents lived in that house. I grew up in it. Nobody has the right to take my soul away from me.

M.N. Serb man from Prizren
HLC interview, 26 April 2004

Our resistance to unfair decisions is our legitimate struggle for the national liberation waged by our people. This struggle needs to be furthered. Our people do not demand their freedom as a gift nor will they go down on their knees... Our people will organise and win freedom regardless of the price.²⁹

20. Murder of father and son in the village of Drajkovce/Drajcok

Dobrivoje Stolić and his son Borko were killed in their yard in the village of Drajkovce/Drajcok during the night of 17/18 March.

Although in the territory of the municipality of Štrpce there were no incidents such as wanton behaviour, arson and destruction of churches and Serb houses, many of our citizens were afraid. The violence in other places devalued all the positive things we've acquired over the last five years. Of late we had more freedom. We moved about freely, went to Prizren, Uroševac, Priština and other places. The police and KFOR did not escort convoys. No incidents were recorded. Police and KFOR checkpoints were abolished. After the perfidious murder of Dobrivoje Stolić and his 22-year old son Borko at night on 17/18 March in the village of Drajkovce, municipality of Štrpce, fear and concern set in amongst the Serbs (...) Unknown attackers opened a burst of fire on the father and his son. They were murdered some time around 22:15 in their own yard. Several bullets had hit Dobrivoje in the head. Hearing the shots Borko came out to see what it was all about. The attackers then wounded him severely. He was taken to Bondstill, the American base, but he succumbed. After that Verica, Borko's mother, went off her head. She is now with her mother-in-law and brother –in-law in Mladenovac. Nobody saw the attackers (...) The next day, not even the police could approach the scene of the crime because there was shooting all around. Later on KFOR soldiers made the access possible. Thirty-five cartridges from automatic rifles were collected from in the yard and boot tracks were found. My brother Stanoje told me about that. He lived in Drajkovci but after that incident he was afraid and, like many others, left the village and came with his wife to my place in Štrpce.

Lj.R. Serb man from Štrpce/Shtërpçë, manager of the Cultural Centre
HLC interview, 2 May 2004

²⁹ The Movement for the National Liberation of Kosovo [Lëvizja kombëtare për clirimin e Kosovës – 23 March 2004]

20.1. Aftermath

After the murder of Dobrivoje and Borko Stolić the municipal authorities ceased to function as the Albanian representatives stopped attending the sessions of the municipal assembly. The Serb KPS members from Štrpce/Shtrëpcë refused to work with their Albanian colleagues because of the violence committed against the Serbs throughout Kosovo. They returned to work when they were told they would be suspended. However, even with such disrupted interethnic relations the Serbs and Albanians from the multiethnic villages of Biti e Ulët /Donje Bitinje, Biti e Epërme/Gornje Bitinje and Sushicë/Sušice agreed to defend their village and their neighbours in case of need and appearance of unknown persons.

The assembly and the assembly bodies do not work. The Albanian employees do not come to work. The Serb employees refuse to work with the Albanians. Some of them are requesting separate offices, for the Serbs and for the Albanians. The assembly session called for 22 April 2004 did not take place because the councilpersons did not turn up. It is thus impossible to take any decisions. Some people abuse the situation and make their return to work contingent on the return of Serbs to Kosovo. They are requesting that the multi-ethnicity be put in force in Priština and other Kosovo towns populated only by Albanians. There are ever-louder demands to carry out put the partition, that is cantonisation etc. And yet, whilst some Serb and Albanian politicians competed in outbursts of ethnic patriotism, villagers in mixed villages in our municipality acted. The Albanians and the Serbs in the villages of Donja and Gornja Bitinja and Sušica have agreed to defend one another against unknown persons and that is something that is positive here and one should make use of it in the time to come.

Lj.R. Serb man from Štrpce/Shtërpcë, manager of the Cultural Centre
HLC interview, 2 May 2004