

KOSOVO FOCUSES ON VICTIMS' RIGHTS AFTER DECADES OF STRIFE

KOSOVO'S TURBULENT HISTORY

Kosovo has known considerable political upheaval and violence in its long history, particularly in the last two decades of the 20th century. After World War II, Kosovo became an autonomous province in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. In the late 1980s, Slobodan Milosevic rose to power in Yugoslavia and eliminated Kosovo's autonomy; in response, Albanian leaders undertook a peaceful resistance movement.

An armed resistance emerged in 1997, after which Milosevic unleashed a brutal campaign against the resistance, including widespread atrocities against civilians. During March – June, 1999, NATO undertook a military airstrike campaign against Serbian military targets. As ethnic cleansing spread, over 800,000 Kosovar Albanians were forced from their homes and approximately 1,500 Kosovar Albanians were abducted, to be released from Serbian prisons after being held for up to 5 years. Additionally, more than 4,500 people went missing. Even after 12 years, approximately 1,900 people are still missing.



Map of Republic of Kosovo

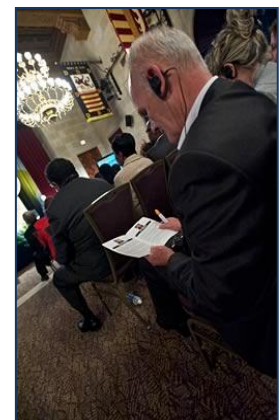
On February 17, 2008, Kosovo declared its independence from Serbia. The United States immediately recognized Kosovo as a sovereign state, followed by many other countries. Having finally gained independence, Kosovo has moved quickly to establish a criminal justice system that incorporates victims' rights and services to meet the needs of the many survivors of war crimes as well as victims of current criminal activities.

EARLY STEPS: A 2010 VISIT TO THE U.S.

Background

Just one month after declaring full independence, Kosovo and the U.S. Embassy there began an active partnership with the Department of Justice's Office of Overseas Prosecutorial Development Assistance and Training (OPDAT) and the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Eastern District of North Carolina (USAO-EDNC). Initial steps included a needs assessment coupled with training and mentoring by the EDNC, which included investigative techniques, case development, advocacy, and plea bargaining, as well as victim issues and rights during the criminal justice process. Kosovo officials welcomed the assistance and were quick to begin integrating what they learned into their fledgling justice system.

Through this partnership, a visit to the U.S. was coordinated for a Kosovar delegation to visit various DOJ agencies. While in Washington, they met with OVC staff, including Acting Director Joye Frost, and attended the National Observance and Candlelight Ceremony and National Crime Victims' Service Awards Ceremony as part of the 2010 National Crime Victims' Rights Week. The delegation was so moved by the events that, upon their return to Kosovo, they hosted the 1st National Crime Victims' Rights Week in the new democracy in October 2010.



Members of the Kosovar delegation listen to a translation of the 2010 National Observance and Candlelight Ceremony in Washington, D.C., on April 15, 2010.

Emphasis

The criminal justice system in Kosovo was challenged to respond to the genocide and other widespread atrocities their country experienced in the 1990s, as well as building a system in which daily criminal activities could be addressed. From the beginning, Kosovo officials have worked to incorporate victims' issues into their system, including public awareness.



Outcomes

Kosovo immediately began working to develop a criminal justice infrastructure and welcomed the advice and expertise of DOJ agencies. They also focused on public outreach, being moved to establish their own country's 1st NCVRW in 2010. The planners made use of OVC-produced materials and theme ("Crime victims' rights: Fairness. Dignity. Respect."), which resonates with victims and service professionals, regardless of nationality.

THE NEXT STEPS: 2011 VISIT TO KOSOVO

Background

Since 2010, Acting Director Frost and OVC staff have supported the efforts of the EDNC to enhance the criminal justice system in Kosovo, focusing efforts on crime victims' rights and responsibilities to victims of human trafficking, domestic violence, and other violent crimes and providing support for Kosovo's first NCVRW outreach.



Joye E. Frost participates in a National Crime Victims' Rights Week Ceremony in Pristina, Kosovo, on October 19, 2011.

At the invitation of the US Embassy Pristina and the USAO-EDNC, under the auspices of OPDAT, OVC Acting Director Frost traveled to Kosovo to attend and speak at events observing its second National Crime Victims' Rights Week, October 17–21, 2011. During Acting Director Frost's visit, she attended and spoke at award ceremonies in three cities: Pristina, Peja, and Sterpce.



Ismet Kabashi, Chief State Prosecutor, speaks at a National Crime Victims' Rights Week Ceremony in Peja, Kosovo, on October 20, 2011.



Ismet Kabashi, Chief State Prosecutor, speaks at a National Crime Victims' Rights Week Ceremony in Sterpce, Kosovo, on October 21, 2011.



Michael Murphy, Charge d'Affaires, U.S. Embassy Pristina, speaks at the NCVRW Ceremony in Sterpce, Kosovo, on October 21, 2011.

Emphasis

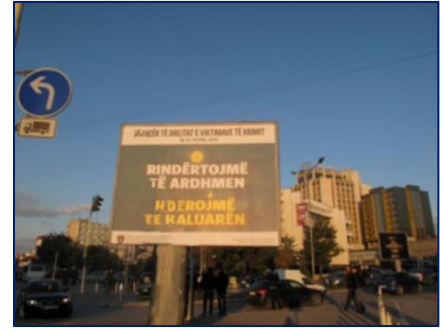
At the 2011 National Crime Victims' Rights Week events in Kosovo, the emphasis was on domestic violence, as evidenced by the participation of Julie Owens, the Southwestern Region Director for the North Carolina Council for Women/Domestic Violence Commission. In 1988, Ms. Owens was kidnapped, beaten, stabbed, and forced to watch the attempted murder of her father by her ex-husband. (A Kosovar victim of family violence spoke as well.) Kosovars are beginning to recognize that domestic violence is a crime, not a family matter, and that public awareness of the issue is urgently needed, particularly in rural areas.



Joye E. Frost is pictured with Alma Kelmendi, Manager of the Division for Victims' Assistance and Support; Julie Owens, Southwestern Region Director for the North Carolina Council for Women Domestic Violence Commission; Remzije Potoku, Grants Assistant at Public Diplomacy Section, U.S. Embassy in Pristina, Lieutenant Tahire Haxholli, Kosovo Police TIP Coordinator; and Michelle Scott, Victim-Witness Coordinator, Eastern District of North Carolina.



Joye E. Frost, Michelle Scott, Victim-Witness Coordinator, Eastern District of North Carolina, and Lieutenant Tahire Haxholli, meet with Kosovo Police Color Guard.



A billboard in Kosovo commemorates the 2011 National Crime Victims' Rights Week.

Outcomes

A young, energetic population has recognized the country's pervasive domestic violence as a high priority for Kosovo's criminal justice system to address. Kosovo has a major task in developing a response to victims and support for those victims who have suffered atrocities and brutality, forced relocation and ethnic hatred. In spite of these challenges, Kosovo has begun to address and seek solutions for other types of victimization in their second year of work.

CONCLUSION

Kosovo is a country of young people with a "can-do" attitude in the wake of decades of suffering in their country. Their hope and optimism is striking after years of repression and punishment for any sort of activism. OVC, OPDAT, and the USAO-EDNC continue to support Kosovo's efforts to build a criminal justice system and raise awareness of victim issues such as domestic violence. The fact that a victim of domestic violence was willing to speak publicly about her experience, illustrates the tremendous strides made by the U.S.-Kosovo partnership in less than 3 years.

ABOUT THE OFFICE FOR VICTIMS OF CRIME

The Office for Victims of Crime is one of six components within the Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice.

Led by Acting Director Joye E. Frost, OVC is committed to enhancing the Nation's capacity to assist crime victims and to providing leadership in changing attitudes, policies, and practices to promote justice and healing for all victims of crime.

Established in 1988 through an amendment to the Victims of Crime Act of 1984, OVC is charged by Congress with administering the Crime Victims Fund. Through OVC, the Fund supports a broad array of programs and services that focus on helping victims in the immediate aftermath of crime and continuing to support them as they rebuild their lives. Millions of dollars are invested annually in victim compensation and assistance in every U.S. state and territory, as well as for training, technical assistance, and other capacity-building programs designed to enhance service providers' ability to support victims of crime in communities across the Nation.

For more information, visit www.ovc.gov.

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