

HLC Report "Ethnic Communities in Kosovo in 2006"

HLC has recently issued its report on the status of human rights among ethnic communities in Kosovo. The report says that significant improvements have been made in freedom of movement and in the integration of the Turkish, Bosniak, Ashkali and Egyptian ethnic communities, but little progress has been made with regard to the Serbs or Roma. The report sets out 15 recommendations for institutions in Kosovo and UNMIK.

The report is based on interviews with 262 members of ethnic communities and on discussions with representatives from central and local government regarding the situation of minorities. Special attention was devoted to the situation of returnees. Subjects covered included security, freedom of movement, access to administrative institutions, use of mother tongue in dealings with local and central institutions, social issues, employment, education in minority languages, private property, participation in political life, return and views on the future status of Kosovo talks and decentralisation.

The report found that significant improvements had been made in freedom of movement and in the integration of the Turkish, Bosniak, Ashkali and Egyptian ethnic communities, but little progress had been made with regard to the Serbs or Roma. There were still daily violations of minority rights and much property had not been returned to its owners. Serious problems remained regarding security, unemployment, education and the use of most minority languages, especially in schools. Relatively few of the displaced persons living in camps in Mitrovica and Plemetina have returned to their hometowns, often because of lack of jobs or destroyed or appropriated homes, and returnees remained subject to violent physical and verbal aggressions. The issue of minority rights has been subject to politicisation and manipulation by politicians, especially by the Serbian government. The report says that the fact that the Serbian government has encouraged Serbs in Kosovo to distance themselves from Kosovo's institutions and society has hindered even minimum integration.

The report recommendations are:

- Interim Kosovo and UNMIK institutions should make greater efforts to improve the overall situation of ethnic communities, especially regarding security, freedom of movement, employment, social services, use of and education in minority languages.
- The institutions must continue to implement standards to ensure the rule of law and involve all ethnic communities as part of this process.
- Local and central government organs and political parties must systematically condemn ethnically-motivated incidents and influence voters, especially the majority Albanian population to try to eliminate causes for these.
- The Kosovo Police Force and UNMIK must investigate all incidents of ethnically motivated violence, track down its perpetrators and publicise the findings of such cases.
- Greater participation of ethnic community representatives in Kosovar institutions should be encouraged at local and central levels, especially with regards to freedom of movement, education in and use of language, and return.
- Greater efforts must be made in law enforcement and monitoring of law implementation, especially of laws of vital interest to minority communities.
- More effort must be made to encourage return of displaced persons, particularly regarding rebuilding homes, repairing religious facilities, returning property and prosecuting usurpers. Institutions should encourage Albanians to consider minority members as fellow citizens and accept returnees.
- Kosovar institutions should continue to invite and encourage displaced persons to return.
- The Kosovo government has an obligation to rebuild all the houses demolished during the March 2004 riots.
- The Kosovo institutions should take every measure to ensure the return to their homes of all Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians still living in the camps of Mitrovica and Plemetina.
- The HLC holds that UNMIK's Privatisation Regulation 2003/13 is discriminatory towards minority employees and should be amended to enable them to receive that which is due to them.
- The Kosovo institutions should create conditions for minority members to be employed in public and private enterprises.
- The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology of Kosovo should prepare programmes to include all Roma children in the education process, in their own language, and allow Serb children to be educated in their language.
- The official educational institutions in Dragas should allow Gorani teachers to return to schools and hold classes using the old system until an appropriate solution is found, without depriving Gorani children of their education.
- The media in Kosovo should become more open to the minority communities and have programmes in the minority languages and Albanian to build awareness and understanding. The media should also report ethnic incidents with greater transparency.

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