



# DOSSIER OF EVIDENCE

## LEAD CONTAMINATED CAMPS OF INTERNALLY DISPLACED ROMA, ASHKALI AND KOSOVAN- EGYPTIAN FAMILIES IN NORTH MITROVICA, KOSOVO

*«Some of the children in the UN camps will die. Those that don't, will have mental and health problems for the rest of their lives.»*

Interview with a laboratory doctor who analyzed the lab test results from the camp, July 2005

Pristine, London, Göttingen, Bern  
June 2009

# DEDICATION

THIS DOSSIER IS DEDICATED TO  
THE INTERNALLY DISPLACED ROMA, ASHKALI  
AND KOSOVAN-EGYPTIAN CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES  
IN NORTHERN KOSOVO  
DRIVEN FROM THEIR HOMES AND  
NEEDLESSLY ABANDONED FOR TEN YEARS  
TO SUFFER THE DEADLY EFFECTS OF  
HEAVY METAL POISONING



## "RED THINGS FROM THE SKY"

(a poem by Paul Polansky)

LEAD IS EVERYWHERE  
ON THE GROUND  
UNDER THE BARRACKS  
IN FRONT OF US  
BEHIND US  
IF YOU'RE OUTSIDE  
STANDING IN ONE PLACE  
YOU SEE LITTLE PIECES OF RED THINGS  
COMING OUT OF THE SKY  
FALLING ON YOU  
FALLING ON THE GROUND  
THAT'S WHAT  
WE'RE BREATHING  
WHAT OUR CHILDREN  
ARE BREATHING  
FROM THE TREPÇA  
SLAG HEAPS  
AND THE UN SAYS  
WE DON'T WANT  
TO MOVE



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## Frontispiece – A Dedication

[Page 2](#)

1. **Opening Statement** by Jasna Causevic on behalf of Society for Threatened Peoples (STP) - Gesellschaft für bedrohte Völker, Göttingen [Page 5](#)
2. **A Unique Case for Medical Evacuation** What follows is the documentary evidence of a disgraceful chain of events in Europe, where ethnic cleansing occurred under the gaze of those whose task was to protect the vulnerable. It was compounded thereafter by years of neglect in which children and their families, abandoned to the damaging effects of extremely high levels of toxicity - by the very organisations whose duty it was to protect them - now have their health ruined by some of the world's highest levels of lead and other heavy metals in their bodies. [Page 6](#)
3. **Executive Summary** of the goal and expected results of the project with a short background of its history and the actual situation. [Page 8](#)
4. **A Chronology** prepared by the Kosovo Medical Emergency Group (KMEG). It provides a background summary of the ten year tragedy of the Mitrovicë/Mitrovica Roma, Ashkali, Egyptian (RAE)) families forced by the UN and their implementing partners to live on toxic wastelands as their children suffer the highest lead levels in recorded medical history. [Page 11](#)
5. **Statement of the Camp Leaders Representing the Families.** KMEG believes that too much has been done without taking these fully into account. Pressures have been applied incorrectly to force the families in certain directions in which they feel fearful, concerned about security, education for their children, work opportunities, involvement in institutions or freedom of movement. [Page 30](#)
6. **A Presentation by Paul Polansky** - Mr Polansky is an author, poet and historian who has lived with Kosovan Romani, Ashkali and Egyptian (RAE) families from 1999 onwards when he initially worked as a UN advisor on Roma matters. He has been a key witness to what the Roma of Kosovo have gone through since the arrival of NATO troops, and from the beginning of the construction of the North Mitrovicë/Mitrovica internally displaced person (IDP) camps on lead toxic wasteland in the Fall of 1999, he has consistently called for their immediate evacuation. [Page 34](#)
7. **The Toxic Effects & Symptoms of Lead Poisoning** in children and fetuses - This details the devastating effects of lead poisoning, particularly its effects on children and pregnant mothers. [Page 40](#)
8. **The Test Results** – These indicate blood lead levels (BLL), and Hair Tests with interpretation. Also included is evidence in the form of an UNMIK report from 2005 detailing huge soil contamination. Particularly relevant are the

latest tests from 2008 for both Osterode camp and Česmin Lug/Çesmin Llug showing that life-threatening contamination continues to be present in many camp occupants. The hair tests which show the contamination is not restricted to lead, but also comprises extreme levels of arsenic, antimony, aluminium, cadmium, tin, manganese and vanadium. Crucially, they also indicate that with all samples, the trace element selenium (helpful for decontamination) was clearly degraded. [Page 42](#)

9. **The Opinions of Medical and Toxicology Experts** from Germany and the UK expressing the need for immediate evacuation. [Page 43](#)
10. **Complete List of all Deaths** that have occurred in the camps, from 1999 to the present. Confirmed through onsite door-to-door research and by the camp leaders themselves. These are partly anonymised to protect the identities of the families. [Page 50](#)
11. **Legal Timeline prepared by Dianne Post, a Human Rights attorney**, who has been attempting to use the power of the law to achieve a resolution of the problem and compensation for the families. It details the key events. [Page 52](#)
12. **Sources of Confusion and Misleading Information** from agencies surrounding the issue of the camps, lead levels, and offers made to the residents. Reference will be made to WHO Press release 2009, CDC Report, Helsinki Report, UN Secretary General's report, etc. [Page 54](#)
13. **Relevant Quotations** from medical experts and those who have been directly involved in attempts to get a resolution. [Page 58](#)
14. **A Collection of Important Letters** involving key figures, who held positions of authority in respect of the camps. [Page 60](#)
15. **Letter to USAID** from Bob Golten (Counsel) "Center for International Human Rights Law & Advocacy, Univ. of Denver)" to Gloria Jean Garland, Senior Rule of Law / Human Rights expert, USAID [Page 71](#)
16. **Reference List of Audio-Visual Information & Media Involvement.** A resume of how the media is working to highlight the current situation. [Page 73](#)
17. **History of IDP camps in Kosovo for Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians.** Provides information concerning International agencies, NGOs, and implementing partners collaborating in the camps and opening/closing of the camps to date. [Page 74](#)
18. **Appendix** Background Summary of the Wars and their Consequences for the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian Minority in Kosovo  
[DOWNLOAD HERE](#)
19. **Corporate Information** [Page 76](#)

## OPENING STATEMENT

### **Society for Threatened Peoples / Gesellschaft für bedrohte Völker, Göttingen**

The danger facing the Roma families in the contaminated camps is an established truth and no longer up for debate.

Over the past 10 years, STP (Society for Threatened Peoples) and its team has tried to pull all the strings and we have written and spoken to a host of individuals in positions of authority in our efforts to obtain their support and active assistance. The team have published reports that cover thousands of pages. Letters have been sent to:

UN Secretaries-General (Kofi Annan and Ban Ki Moon), all UNMIK agencies in Kosovo, and all relevant UN organizations including UNHCR, UNICEF and WHO, all Albanian and Serbian government representatives, including the political parties they belong to, Governments of EU member states and other countries, EU Prime Ministers, EU Foreign Ministers and Environment and Health Ministers, the President of the European Commission, the Speaker of the European Parliament, party groupings in the European Parliament, humanitarian organizations, medical associations and environmental medicine bodies in Germany.

There have been countless press releases and appeals issued in the name of STP and the families, with the European Parliament eventually adopting a resolution on Kosovo that includes a brief reference to the issue.

I am not trying to hype up the extent of our involvement. The point is that Society for Threatened Peoples have already approached a whole range of significant figures. This is not some vague and insubstantial presence masquerading as the notional concept of "the International Community". These are individual politicians in positions of responsibility who have been directly and specifically approached in the effort to gain their support.

It has to be said that we have had very limited success.

- Thanks to pressure from us, only two of the camps have been closed. In spite of vehement opposition on our part, Osterode was deemed to be a suitable alternative.
- We have only succeeded in rescuing one family, and that was due to a bit of quick thinking. We were required to give our guarantee that we would cover all the family's costs when due, **before, during and after** the detoxification therapy lasting two months. At the end of the two months, the German authorities wanted to deport the family as there was no more financial support available. We had expected this situation would arise and had already engaged a lawyer to represent the family, and we succeeded in obtaining temporary permission for them to remain in Germany. The family's status is still unresolved, and they will shortly be facing a further threat of deportation – along with another 38,000 Roma living in Germany. The cost incurred on this family's behalf amounted to approximately 80,000 euros.

The politicians did nothing more than pay lip service with their responses. I have folders full of correspondence with these people filed in our office.

**Jasna Causevic - Society for Threatened Peoples / Gesellschaft für bedrohte Völker, Göttingen**

## A UNIQUE CASE FOR MEDICAL EVACUATION

What follows is the documentary evidence of a disgraceful chain of events in Europe, where ethnic cleansing occurred under the gaze of those whose task was to protect the vulnerable. It was compounded thereafter by years of neglect in which children and their families abandoned to the damaging effects of extremely high levels of toxicity, by the very organisations whose duty it was to protect them, now have their health ruined by some of the world's highest levels of lead and other heavy metals in their bodies.

The situation of the displaced RAE (Roma, Ashkali, Egyptians) is UNIQUE. It is NOT just another case of displaced people left in camps years after a conflict. These are not only displaced, but their displacement happened while western nations, whose duty it was to protect them, stood by. Inactive at the scene, those nations subsequently placed them in a dangerously toxic environment, and for years thereafter effectively ignored their plight.

Now damaged both physically and mentally, their children who are especially vulnerable to toxins absorbed by their vital organs, require evacuation immediately and the highest level of medical treatment, involving chelation therapies, regular monitoring and testing, plus corrective dietary supplements as dictated by medical experts in the treatment of lead poisoning.

**This is Europe's greatest health emergency for children, and for those reasons their situation is unique, their need is paramount, and action to save them should be immediate.**

It is time to put matters right, to recognise and rectify our errors of both the past and present, and provide these few families with shelter, where their lives and long term health can be reconstructed. Due to their present location and the ongoing organ damage afflicting their children today, they must be taken to a place of safety, with good health provision and opportunity.

Below we see the key players in the tragedy, and the broken promises made. Here are those that failed in their duty to protect.

NATO forces were present in 1999 when this ethnic minority's long-established community of 1000 homes was destroyed. These forces passively stood by saying it was the job of local police to mount protection while knowing full well that the local police had long ago fled.

THE UNITED NATIONS and its agencies - UNMIK, UNHCR, UNHCHR and WHO - have the duty to protect the vulnerable. Yet in spite of advice to the contrary from some of their own experts, and its own Convention on the Rights of the Child, UN agencies placed these people in harm's way on the most toxic site in Europe. The most senior representatives promised to take them to safety after 45 days, but failed to do so. Inadequate aid, lack of medical care, perpetration of

misleading information implying the victims are in some way guilty typify the public attitudes of many of these UN agencies.

EUROPEAN UNION countries have sent many representatives to Kosovo. Many countries now support Kosovo's declaration of independence and wish Kosovo to succeed. EULEX is responsible for the rule of law throughout Kosovo. Many countries within the EU pride themselves on their human rights policies. **Yet, not one offers to harbour these forgotten human beings of Kosovo.**

THE MEDIA In 1999 when the NATO alliance declared its moral obligation to defend the vulnerable of Kosovo, it was politically expedient to widely ignore another oppression that was being perpetrated by some of those whom NATO was defending. The media was effectively silent then, and largely it remains so today.

[Return to Top](#)

[Return to Contents](#)



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### History - Key Points (For the detailed chronology see p. 13 -31)

Roma and Ashkali ('Gypsy') IDPs were knowingly placed in so-called 'temporary' camps set up in 1999 by the UN on highly toxic land. At that time in September 1999, the Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG), Dr. Bernard Kouchner, gave an assurance that they would only be on these lands (in these camps) for 45 days.

But the UN failed to honour its 45-day commitment, and the families have been living on lead-poisoned sites for nearly 10 years now. Health problems rapidly developed in the children, and UN health officers called for an evacuation in their November 2000 report. Numerous sets of Blood Lead Level (BLL) tests were carried out. In November 2004, the World Health Organisation (WHO) stated that an immediate evacuation and medical treatment was necessary, repeating a call from 2000. Some results especially in young children were found to be the highest in recorded medical history. In December 2004, the International Committee for the Red Cross (ICRC) also called for an evacuation of the camps within 24 hrs.

The only action the UN did take was to move all families from Zitkovac and Kablare camps into similar toxic conditions at Osterode camp (see map), previously occupied by French KFOR soldiers who were also severely lead-poisoned, and had been warned not to father children for 9 months after they were evacuated. Test results performed on the Romani IDPs were never made public although we have obtained them from staff whistleblowers in the very organizations that are trying to cover up this tragedy.

### Features of Kosovo/Mitrovica



Map of the Osterode camp and surroundings

Kosovo is a province within the borders of the former Yugoslavia that was (until its self-declared independence in February 2008), controlled by the United Nations (UN).

This territory has experienced multiple infrastructure, economic, human rights, and public health problems as a result of the conflicts.

The Trepca mining and smelting complex, established in the 1930s, constituted the biggest mining company in Europe. The Trepca smelter in Mitrovica extracted metals including zinc, arsenic, lead, and cadmium from the products of nearby mines. Trepca operations have been an important part of the Mitrovica economy in the past, providing employment in both the smelter and the mines to people in the region.



The UN halted operations in 2000 after UN peace keeper forces in the area were discovered to have high blood lead levels (BLLs). According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC, US Govt.) report from 2007:

"Although the smelter has been closed since 2000, the environment remains heavily contaminated. Three mine tailing dams [...] are located in northern Mitrovica and the nearby town of Zvečan. Results from soil samples taken by staff of the World Health Organization (WHO) in 2004 as part of a health risk assessment for heavy metals in Mitrovica and Zvečan showed that more than 90% of the samples exceeded the UK limits for lead (450 mg/Kg), with many samples having levels more than 10 times higher than the limit; more than 40% exceeded the limit for arsenic levels; and almost 30% exceeded the limit for cadmium levels. Both the northern and southern areas of Mitrovica are contaminated by lead. However, the results of both environmental testing and blood testing indicate that Mitrovica is more contaminated north of the river where the Trepça smelter is located."<sup>1</sup>

### **Actual situation**

On 11<sup>th</sup> April 2009 **Ergin Salihi**, a nine year old boy from the Osterode camp, was sent to Kraguevac hospital in critical condition with damaged kidneys. Prof. Dr. Anđelka Stojković-Andelković who examined Ergin stated he was suffering from Nephritic syndrome caused in her opinion from malnutrition. However, she was not aware that Ergin has lived all his life on toxic wasteland in a former UN camp and that his blood lead levels – twice measured by the WHO – were higher than their instrument could measure. After Ergin was sent to the Mitrovica hospital and when his condition got worse, he was sent to a hospital in Belgrade. But there, the doctors refused to do more blood tests or treat Ergin for lead poisoning. End of May Ergin was sent back to Osterode. Because his food supply consists only of garbage leftovers and he is exposed to the lead again, it is feared that he won't survive, even though he is receiving some supplements in the form of fruit and vegetables. Meanwhile, the health of another child Sara Jahorović, has deteriorated.

After our campaign found a great international response, first signs showed that at least the claim of evacuation could be reached till the end of August 2009. At the moment the information is circulating that the government of Kosovo as well as the UNMIK are willing to close the camps as soon as possible and that they already have plans for that. But till now they have only spoken about resettlement, without the urgently needed medical treatment.

At the moment there is no safe and no poisoned place within Kosovo where these families could be treated medically.

On 1<sup>st</sup> April 2009 **Hilmi Jashari, Acting Ombudsperson of Republik of Kosovo**, wrote a letter to Hashim Thaçi, Prime Minister of Kosovo, and recommended "the immediate and sustainable relocation of the Roma population living in the camps in the North" and "the immediate intervention of the Ministry of Health, in cooperation with the Ministry of Communities and Return in order to

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<sup>1</sup> Source : <http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/lead/publications/Kosovoreport.pdf>, page 4

improve the health condition of the Roma population still living in the camps and/or still affected by the lead contamination.” (see p.62)

After a four-day visit in March 2009, **Thomas Hammarberg, Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights**, presented his preliminary impressions on the general human rights situation in Kosovo and expressed deep concern about the lead-contaminated Roma camps in northern Mitrovica (see p. 60).

At a meeting with the camp leaders in 2008, Paul Polansky was given the authority to convey their message internationally - in calling for their evacuation and medical treatment. All families are now fully aware of the dangers to their children of the lead poisoning and the effects it will have on their lives. On February 2009, the three camp leaders signed a statement of what they and their people want (see p. 32).

In response to a direct letter of appeal from MEP Baroness Emma Nicholson to Dr. Bernard Kouchner (French Foreign Minister) in 2008, in which she reminded him of his 45-day assurances (when she and Dr. Kouchner visited the camps together in 1999), Dr. Kouchner only expressed personal concern and gave a number of unspecified, diplomatic assurances (see p. 66).

[Return to Top](#)

[Return to Contents](#)

## A CHRONOLOGY prepared by the KMEG team

Beginning with key quotes, this provides a background summary of the wars, their consequences for the IDPs in North Mitrovicë/Mitrovica, and the role of the United Nations (UN) and other agencies.

***"This is a humanitarian disaster of the most serious nature. It is no less than scandalous that no solution has been found to protect the inhabitants, including children, even five years after it was conclusively established that living in this area was hazardous. I appeal urgently to all those responsible to ensure that the affected families can move without delay to a secure environment and that proper medical care is provided to all those contaminated."***

(Thomas Hammarberg, Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, 27<sup>th</sup> Mars 2009)

***"Some of the children in the UN camps will die. Those that don't, will have mental and health problems for the rest of their lives"***

(Interview with a laboratory doctor who analyzed the lab test results from the camp, July 2005).

***"People who lived on these toxic wastelands were sacrificed for human studies - that's what the scientists and researchers did in the past. But now the international humanitarian agencies should know better than to build camps on toxic waste."***

(Dr Rohko Kim, world expert on toxic poisoning, special mission to Kosovo, 2005).

***"You will recall that during your time in office on behalf of the UN and the international community, a block of IDPs of Roma families were placed by UNHCR on the tailing stands of a lead mine. I recall visiting them myself when I also had the honour of meeting with you. You stated then that these families would be removed immediately."***

(MEP Baroness Emma Nicholson's letter to Bernard Kouchner, French Foreign Minister, November 2008)

***"I think the danger is so great that it threatens to destroy one full generation of Romani children. UNHCR made a catastrophic mistake by building these camps. Nobody cared about the danger of this location. This is very tragic for everybody but especially for the Roma inhabitants."***

(Ilija Elezović, former staff member, UNMIK, Mitrovicë/Mitrovica, 2005)

## **CHRONOLOGY OF GROSS NEGLECT AND BUREAUCRATIC INERTIA IN NORTH MITROVICĚ/MITROVICA CAMPS – A DECADE OF DE-HUMANIZATION AND IMMORAL TREATMENT OF ROMANI, ASHKALI, AND BALKAN-EGYPTIAN IDPs BY THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY AND AUTHORITIES IN KOSOVO (1999-2009)**

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### **1999: June 16**

After NATO troops arrived in Kosovo, black uniformed KLA (Kosovo Liberation Army) soldiers begin visiting homes in the Romani (Gypsy) settlement (*mahalla*) of Fabrička in south Mitrovicë/Mitrovica. This is the largest Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian (RAE) community in Kosovo, with about 1,000 families comprising about 8,000 people. The RAE families are told that Kosovo is only for Albanians and the RAE must leave if they want to save their families. Over the next three months, many RAE families lock up their homes and move across the Ibar River into north Mitrovicë/Mitrovica. But accommodation is unavailable as thousands of Serbs also flee from Albanian nationalists. Most Mitrovicë/Mitrovica RAE leave for refugee camps in either Montenegro or Serbia. Later, several thousands leave via clandestine routes to join relatives in Germany and other countries in western and northern Europe. Also in June, about 50 families from Fabrička mahalla flee to the north Kosovan town of Leposaviq/Leposavić where the Yugoslav army gives them an army warehouse to take shelter in. According to one Romani activist at Leposaviq/Leposavić, when they first arrived in 1999, there was only one huge room with no partitions for privacy or hygiene facilities. The Roma hang blankets to partition off living space for each family.

### **1999: August**

Paul Polansky, an adviser to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) on Romani issues, visits the Fabrička neighbourhood to assess the situation. He finds Albanians looting many of the abandoned homes. He asks French NATO troops in the area to intervene. Their Commanding Officer (CO) replies that they are not a police force, and that their mandate is only to protect Albanians from the local Serbs. The CO advises Polansky to find the local police to sort out the looting. There are no local police. The Serbs used to be the local police force and they too have fled.

### **1999: September 3**

Polansky returns to Fabrička to find the community now empty of all Romani, Ashkali and Egyptian families. Albanians are dismantling most of the RAE homes, taking doors, windows, roof tiles and beams. Polansky again protests to French KFOR (Kosovo Force) soldiers and is told he will be detained if he continues bothering KFOR soldiers about a local police matter.

Polansky and his Romani interpreter Mr. Gashnaji cross the Ibar River and find about 800 Fabrička RAE squatting in a Serbian school house in Zvečan/Zvečan. *They are the last of the south Mitrovicë/Mitrovica RAE from Fabrička, too poor to follow their neighbours to Montenegro and Serbia. Most have not washed or eaten for days, some for weeks.* Polansky contacts Oxford Committee for

**Famine Relief (OXFAM)** who bring urgently needed water and hygiene supplies for the families. He also contacts The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) who supply food parcels.

### **1999: September**

Baroness Nicholson meets Bernard Kouchner, Special Representative of the UN Secretary General (SRSG) at camps when he stated the families would be moved immediately.

### **1999: End of September**

Local Serb authorities demand that UNHCR evacuate the Fabrička IDPs from the schoolhouse since it is needed for the new school year. UNHCR signs a contract with the local Serbian authorities of Zhitkovc/Žitkovac to rent a plot of land for 45 days next to an abandoned lead mining site where the IDPs can be housed in tents until UNHCR can find a permanent solution for these 800 vulnerable inhabitants. *Polansky accompanies the IDPs to the hurriedly erected tent city but protests to UNHCR officials that the tents have been put on toxic wasteland, next to slag heaps from the local lead mines.*

***David Riley, head of UNHCR in Kosovo, assures Polansky that this is a temporary solution for only 45 days, and that if the "Fabrička Gypsies" cannot be returned to their homes by that time, then they will be taken abroad for resettlement.***<sup>2</sup> A few days later Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) Dr. Bernard Kouchner (founder of *Medecins San Frontieres*, and currently the Foreign Minister of France) visits the site with British MEP Baroness Emma Nicholson who also protests the placement of the camp on toxic wasteland. **Dr. Kouchner personally assures Baroness Nicholson that the camp will be closed within 45 days and the inhabitants resettled elsewhere (see correspondence between Nicholson and Kouchner from 2008, p. 63-66)**

### **1999: November**

With the onset of cold winter weather, the IDP leaders protest that their community cannot survive the winter in the makeshift tents. UNHCR claims they have no other solution. Mysteriously, the tents burn down and UNHCR has to house the IDPs in an apartment building.

### **1999: December**

*There are not enough apartments in Zhitkovc/Žitkovac to accommodate all the IDPs, so UNHCR contracts with ACT (Action by Churches Working Together) to build a camp in north Mitrovicë/Mitrovica called Česmin Lug/Çesmin Llug. These barracks are built next to the railroad tracks that border the tailing stands of the Trepča lead mines. These barracks are built with old lead-painted boards. Another 300 of the 800 IDPs are taken to the old warehouse in the town of*

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<sup>2</sup>David Riley died on Jan. 19, 2000, at the age of 50 in Prishtinë/Priština, Kosovo, in his sleep. See <http://www.unmikonline.org/pub/news/nl24.html> for more details.

Leposaviq/Leposavić. Polansky returns to the United States but continues to protest to David Riley, then Head of UNHCR, about the Zhitkovc/Žitkovac and Česmin Lug/Česmin Llug camps being placed on highly toxic wasteland.

Lead contamination and its high concentration in the blood of the local population of Mitrovicë/Mitrovica were already known from previous epidemiologic and environmental studies arranged by the United Nations in 1999 **BEFORE** the installation of the three camps (Česmin Lug/Česmin Llug, Kablar/Kablare, Zhitkovc/Žitkovac), however the International Community fails to act on this knowledge.

The RAE leaders fear their children are getting sick living on the toxic wasteland and call for a meeting with UNMIK, UNHCR, OSCE, KFOR and the Albanian leaders of south Mitrovicë/Mitrovica. Although most of their homes have no roofs, doors or windows, the RAE plead to be allowed to return to their homes. The Albanian leaders of south Mitrovicë/Mitrovica veto the proposal. They say they want no more Gypsies in their communities. The Albanians say they cannot guarantee the lives of the Gypsies if they return to their old neighbourhood.

### **2000: January**

Half the Zhitkovc/Žitkovac RAE IDPs are moved to the hurriedly built, makeshift barracks at Česmin Lug/Česmin Llug by UNHCR. The inhabitants protest, saying they have only a few stoves and very little firewood to keep their children warm during the harsh winter.

David Riley, age 50, dies on the night of 19<sup>th</sup> of January. Polansky continues to protest to the acting head of UNHCR in Prishtina - Dennis McNamara (an expert on IDPs within the UN system) but he refuses to answer any emails from Polansky.

### **2000: Spring**

Polansky returns to Kosovo to find the IDPs in Zhitkovc/Žitkovac back in tents on the toxic waste. The Česmin Lug/Česmin Llug camp is also still being housed on the toxic wastelands. Polansky goes to UNHCR headquarters in Prishtinë/Priština to complain, but the head of UNHCR Dennis McNamara refuses to see him. No one else at UNHCR can answer his questions about the future of these Fabrička RAE. Polansky visits the old neighbourhood of Fabrička and finds all the homes, more than 1,000 (where 8,000 RAE used to live) completely destroyed. Not one house has a roof, doors or windows. Many Albanians are now chopping out the bricks from the remaining walls.

### **2000: Summer/Fall**

SRSB Dr. Bernard Kouchner orders his UN medical team to make an investigation of the lead pollution in the entire Mitrovicë/Mitrovica area. French army doctors have reported several cases of lead poisoning in their soldiers who are quartered in an old Serbian army base 100 meters from the IDP camp at Česmin Lug/Česmin Llug.



***Dr. Andrei Andreyew, the UN health officer for Mitrovicë/Mitrovica, heads the investigation and reports directly to Dr. Kouchner. Random blood testing carried out in August and September 2000 by Dr. Andrei Andreyew, a Russian consultant to the United Nations, confirms dangerous levels of lead poisoning in the RAE camps of Zhitkovc/Žitkovac and Çesmin Llug/Česmin Lug<sup>3</sup>. The lead levels are so high in some of the children that the Belgium lab doing the analysis asks for the tests to be redone. The lab has never seen such high lead levels. The second tests confirm the first tests.***

## **2000: November**

Dr. Andreyew submits his written report to Dr. Kouchner, head of UNMIK and a report to the World Health Organization (WHO), ***recommending evacuation of the RAE camps and fencing off the land so that the public cannot accidentally enter.***

His investigation shows that the entire population of Mitrovicë/Mitrovica is suffering from unhealthy levels of lead poisoning. ***However, the highest levels (three to four times higher than the average in Mitrovicë/Mitrovica) were found in the children in the IDP camps of Çesmin Llug/Česmin Lug and Zhitkovc/Žitkovac.*** He also recommends that UNMIK close the smelter at Zvečan/Zvečan because the prevailing winds bring the toxic dust from the smelter and the nearby slag heaps directly past Çesmin Llug/Česmin Lug and the French base now called Osterode camp.

***Dr. Kouchner closes the smelter but does not evacuate the Romani camps. Dr. Andreyew leaves Kosovo and no one at UNMIK follows up on his recommendations to solve the lead poisoning in Mitrovicë/Mitrovica.*** However, all UN police, UNMIK staff and KFOR soldiers stationed in the Mitrovicë/Mitrovica area are required to take blood tests every month to check their lead levels. No more tests are made of the RAE in the camps until 2004.

*Dr. Andreyew's report, which UNMIK refused to release to the public, was never acted upon, with one exception: several international UNMIK police officers were tested, since they jogged daily on a path by the slag heaps near the Çesmin Lug/Çesmin Llug camp. Their lead levels were so high that UNMIK immediately repatriated them since lead poisoning cannot be treated at the source of poisoning without causing dangerous complications.*

Thus, though in 2000, UNMIK and other UN agencies themselves report on the extent of environmental damage, the local population is not informed about the degree of the danger they are being exposed to, as well as the long-term health risks.

Later that year, a small Romani boy at Çesmin Llug/Česmin Lug is killed by a train. Action by Churches Together (ACT) built the barracks where he lives only two meters from the tracks. After his death, ACT place a few strands of barbed wire between the tracks and the barracks to keep the children from wandering onto the railroad tracks.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.errc.org/cikk.php?cikk=2460>

## 2001: January/Winter

Several international NGOs take clothes and food to the three Romani camps since these items are always in short supply. UNHCR provides the basic necessities and keeps promising the IDPs they won't have to spend another winter in the camps. Paul Polansky, representing German-based international NGO *Society for Threatened Peoples* (Gesellschaft für bedrohte Völker GfbV)<sup>4</sup>, continues to lobby for the Romani IDPs to be moved from the toxic wastelands. He is assured by UNHCR field officers that plans are underway to resettle all the IDPs in the three camps abroad since UNMIK recognizes that it is still too dangerous for the IDPs to return to their original settlement in Albanian controlled south Mitrovicë/Mitrovica.

Meanwhile, in the Leposaviq/Leposavić IDP camp, *Doctors without Borders* (Medecins Sans Frontieres) assists the Roma in building partitions on the premises so that each family has one small room with at least some privacy. The only access to water is from standpipes in the front of the buildings, so hygiene is very difficult to maintain and many become ill. Toilets were located outdoors, and initially with inadequate drainage with the result that there were many cases of sickness. *Doctors without Borders* (Medecins Sans Frontieres) helped the residents construct better toilet facilities. The lack of appropriate washing facilities for either adults or children causes many health problems. Poor quality food, lack of clean water and cramped living conditions contribute to a high incidence of disease among camp residents.

## 2002

**UNHCR shelves all of its plans to resettle the camp Roma abroad.** UNHCR contracts ACT (Action by Churches Working Together) office in Prishtinë/Priština to build barracks on the same toxic land in Zhitkovc/Žitkovac, replacing the tents. Since UNHCR has stated that the barracks are only temporary, they are built using second-hand materials, *especially old lead-painted boards*. As there are no water facilities on site, UNHCR makes an agreement with KFOR to truck in a minimum supply of water every few days. There is only one tap for all the families, who have to line up to get water.

*Later that year, UNHCR stops all food and hygiene aid to all three camps, after a report from ACT saying the IDPs are selling part of their aid. The RAE IDPs admit they were selling some of their aid to buy shoes and schoolbooks for their children, but complain they never received enough aid to feed themselves and now they are starving.* ACT and UNHCR representatives call the IDPs "parasites" and tell them they have to find their own food, hygiene products, and firewood. Several families leave the camps and end up in Serbia begging and sleeping under bridges. Those who remain in the camps find most of their food in the city's garbage containers. Groups of IDP children from the Zhitkovc/Žitkovac camp wait every morning at the Zvečan/Zvečan municipal dump where the Mitrovicë/Mitrovica city garbage trucks drop their daily collections. Paul Polansky has a heart attack and returns to the USA for a double bypass operation.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.gfbv.de/inhaltsDok.php?id=612>

## 2003/2004

The UN health officer for Mitrovicë/Mitrovica, Dr. Sergi Shevchenko, an optometrist from Canada, submits a proposal to build a 1.5-kilometer jogging track, outdoor basketball court, and soccer field on the toxic wastelands between the Çesmin Llug/Çesmin Lug camp and the toxic slag heaps. UNMIK accepts his proposal and funds it. The sporting facilities are called the "Alley of Health" after a famous sports centre in Canada. Three-meter high signs in four languages are posted at several places along the jogging track encouraging people to "breathe in the air of health." *Dr. Shevchenko does not warn the IDP children who flock to use the sporting facilities that exercise opens the lungs, thus allowing more toxic dust to be inhaled. French soldiers stationed at the nearby Osterode camp are told not to use the jogging track. UN police stationed in Mitrovicë/Mitrovica are also cautioned. Only the IDP children are encouraged to use the sports facilities.*

With no food aid being received from UNHCR/ACT, the IDPs in the camps of Zhitkovc/Žitkovac and Çesmin Llug/Çesmin Lug are offered work smelting car batteries by a local Serb businessman, who has even been granted a license to smelt these car batteries by UNMIK administrators in Zvečan/Zvecani and openly delivers them to the camps every morning at 10AM. After smelting, the plastic battery casings are piled up at the entrance of each camp for this Serb businessman to take away once a week in a car and trailer. UNHCR and their implementing partner, ACT do not prohibit the smelting, just the opposite, saying, "It is time the RAE went to work instead of being parasites".

Five weeks after his heart operation, Polansky returns to Kosovo to live permanently with the Roma in the enclaves south of Prishtinë/Priština. While now representing Society of Threatened Peoples (STP) fulltime in Kosovo, he also forms a UN-registered NGO with several local Roma called Kosovo Roma Refugee Foundation. Their objective is to help returning RAE refugees and IDPs, mainly with small business projects funded by the Swiss government. Polansky also begins several intensive English-language classes for RAE in the enclaves, Peja/Peć and Gjakovë/Djakovica. Using volunteer American teachers, the program teaches English to more than 200 RAE. With their English language skills, many now get jobs with KFOR and several international NGOs as interpreters.

## 2004: March/April

Four-year-old Djenita Mehmeti is sent home from the camp school in Zhitkovc/Žitkovac after her teacher sees she is losing her memory and complaining of pains in her legs. Many mothers in both camps complain to ACT staff that their children are always sick. The most common complaints are daily vomiting, memory loss, poor co-ordination, getting highly nervous and then falling into a coma for several minutes. The local hospital in north Mitrovicë/Mitrovica refers Djenita to a Serbian hospital in Kragujevac. She is not sent to Belgrade because her doctor doesn't think she would survive the journey. *Djenita is treated for three months before being sent back to the UN camp at Zhitkovc/Žitkovac. **A few weeks later she falls into a coma and dies. Because many children in the camps have the same symptoms, WHO is asked to investigate.*** They ask Miljana Stojanović of the Institute of Public

Health in north Mitrovicë/Mitrovica to perform blood tests on most of the children in the camps. WHO donates a new Lead Care Analyser for the testing. The tests are conducted in April 2004. *The results are staggering. All the children have life-threatening lead levels, most over 65 mg/dl, the highest the analyser can register.*

***After the investigation prompted by the death of Djenita Mehmeti, and the compiling of the information from the blood lead level (BLL) results, WHO Pristinë/Priština sends a letter to UNMIK calling for an immediate evacuation of the UN camps. UNMIK refuses, claiming that they have no place to take 500 Gypsies. UNMIK pleads lack of resources to tackle the problem, and says they are too involved in preventing a new war between Albanians and Serbs in Kosovo to be bothered about the logistics of saving 500 Gypsy IDPs. UNMIK, however, does begin holding meetings twice a month with NGOs concerned about the lead poisoning. Key participants at these meetings are: WHO, UNHCR, ACT, NCA, ICRC, Swiss Red Cross, OSCE and KFOR.***

## **2004: November**

**Finally, a broader segment of the international community (NGOs, etc.) become fully aware of the extent of this lead poisoning tragedy.**

The Swiss Red Cross invites Paul Polansky to attend the second meeting organized by UNMIK. *Most of the discussion focuses on where the IDPs could be relocated. UNMIK proposes the old lead-smelting complex in south Mitrovicë/Mitrovica. UNHCR says they could bring in containers to house the families, but the containers are not winterised. Polansky complains that this is just moving the families from one toxic site to another. Polansky proposes airlifting all the camp IDPs to Fort Dix, New Jersey (USA), where over 7,000 Kosovan Albanians were taken in 1999 until it was safe to return them to Kosovo. The KFOR representative supports the proposal, however UNHCR says it is not politically feasible.*<sup>5</sup> At this second meeting of NGOs in November 2004 to discuss relocation of the IDPs to safer areas within Kosovo province, Ms. Gerry McWeeney of WHO (currently based at WHO-Belgrade) surprises some of the participants by calling for a risk-management committee to be set up, instead of WHO's earlier demands for immediate evacuation. At the same meeting, she also declares that Polansky and others cannot prove that Djenita died of lead poisoning, despite clear evidence to the contrary provided by her treatments, symptoms, and the blood lead levels of her two-year-old sister Nikolina.<sup>6</sup>

Other committees are proposed by the international community. Swiss Red Cross and Polansky are not invited back to any other meetings. No proposal for relocation is ever put to the camp leaders, but several weeks later, UNHCR and

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<sup>5</sup>As victims of war in Kosovo, having been forced to remain as IDPs for 10 years from 1999, given the severity of contamination of the lead toxic camps they live on, the NATO countries should offer them a medical evacuation.

<sup>6</sup> See Paul Polansky (2005), *UN-leaded Blood*, Kosovo Roma Refugee Foundation, p. 14.

ACT begin circulating rumours that the IDPs were offered alternative housing but refused it.<sup>7</sup>

*In December, two-year-old Nikolina Mehmeti falls into a coma with the same symptoms her sister had before her death. A UN medical team request permission from Dr. Sergi Shevchenko to transport Nikolina by ambulance to hospital in Belgrade. Dr. Shevchenko, a Canadian-Ukrainian doctor working for the UN's Health Division in Kosovo, refuses. Many women in the camps complain of difficult pregnancies and more than 50 have miscarriages. **ICRC sends a letter to UNMIK demanding immediate evacuation of the camps. UNMIK refuses.***

During the year, many Kosovan RAE refugees return from Serbia after UNHCR says it is safe to return. When they find their homes have not been rebuilt in south Mitrovicë/Mitrovica, and that the local Albanians are still antagonistic towards them, these refugees move into abandoned barracks next to Çesmin Llug/Česmin Lug, called Kablar/Kablare. The barracks are directly in front of the French base at Osterode camp. The barracks were abandoned by Serbian workers before the 1999 war because asbestos was discovered in the walls and roofs, and also because of high toxicity from the nearby slag heaps.

**UNHCR does not prevent the other IDPs returning from Serbia inhabiting the barracks.** In fact, Dr. Shevchenko immediately submits a proposal to UNMIK to build 300 more barracks on the site for other IDPs who may follow.

Polansky, funded by SFTP, sends his staff (two Romani women) into the camps twice a week to interview the Romani, Ashkali and Egyptian women about the health conditions of their children and to deliver much needed hygiene products. **Most of the women beg for contraceptive pills so they won't have any more children. All children in the camp are suffering from neurological disorders. A Czech psychiatrist, Hana Klimenova, working for WHO, tells Swiss Red Cross and Polansky that, "We have lost an entire generation of RAE children in the camps to mental retardation."** The lead levels are now so high in all the mothers that doctors consulted are of the opinion that every child conceived in the camps will be born with irreversible brain damage. To combat the IDPs' continuing fear of lead poisoning, UNHCR send one of their staff to all the families telling them they don't have lead poisoning but are suffering the effects of depleted uranium from the NATO bombs used during the war.

In 2004 and 2005, the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) begin compiling a prospective database of returnees to the South Mahalla and preparing more

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<sup>7</sup> In Nov 2004 UNMIK in Mitrovicë/Mitrovica began to say that the IDPs were offered an alternative place to move to but had refused. Polansky asked UNMIK at the time to tell him where the Roma had been offered alternative accommodation. UNMIK finally told him that the Roma had been offered an old building next to the old smelter on the south side of the river. It would be cleaned up for them. But it too was on a toxic site and of course on the south side. But ever since, UNMIK has declared that the Roma were offered a resettlement plan but refused. The Roma have never been offered a medical solution to save their children. They are still waiting for one.

project proposals for the resettlement of Roma in the South Mahalla. However the majority of RAE are extremely resistant to these proposals (the situation has not changed and the few Roma who previously moved to the south want to return to the north).

## 2005

A staff member of WHO, upset by UNMIK's and WHO's apparent cover-up of the tragedy, asks Paul Polansky to let the world know what is happening. Polansky publishes an opinion piece in the *International Herald Tribune* about the plight in these UN camps<sup>8</sup>.

***Though several other journalists pick up the story, UNMIK authorities still refuse to evacuate the camps.*** Many children experience spells of unconsciousness but receive no medical treatment. Because Dr. Shevchenko refuses to help Nikolina, on the grounds that she lives in the camp at Zhitkovc/Žitkovac, which is outside his area of jurisdiction (even though she attends a hospital in his jurisdiction), Polansky takes Nikolina and her mother to Belgrade for treatment.

Upon arrival, Nikolina falls into a coma. The hospital, *Mother & Child Institute*, ("Insitut Majka I dete") in Belgrade, the only place in the Balkans that treats lead poisoning, are horrified by her blood test results that reveal life-threatening lead levels. Polansky pays the hospital to allow Nikolina's mother to stay with her. Nikolina is treated for three weeks.

During that time, Polansky persuades the Swiss Red Cross to rent accommodation in Priluzhë/Prilužja where the family has relatives, in order to avoid Nikolina having to return home to the source of poisoning that the hospital says is liable to kill her. Later, Polansky finds an American Jewish philanthropist to buy a piece of land for the family and persuades the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) to build a new home for the family.

A few weeks later, Polansky agrees to take 13 Romani, Ashkali and Egyptian children and their mothers to Belgrade for treatment. All have lead levels higher than the maximum the analyser can register. None of the children have birth certificates or passports. Polansky asks ICRC for international travel permits to take the children to Serbia. ICRC refuse, saying they are unable to become involved in what is a political issue. Nevertheless, means are found to get them all to enter Serbia.

Since the children have referral papers from the local Serbian hospital in north Mitrovicë/Mitrovica showing their life-threatening lead levels, ***the Mother & Child Hospital ("Institut Majka i dete)*** agrees to accept the children for chelation treatment. Treatment is free because the mothers have Serbian IDs, but Polansky has to pay for the mothers to stay in the hospital with their children. Polansky has funds thanks to a donation to help these children by a Jewish philanthropist in the USA.

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.iht.com/articles/2005/04/25/opinion/edpolansky.php>



The hospital tells Polansky that treatment will take three to four weeks, but after the treatment, **the children cannot be taken back to the source of poisoning, otherwise they will experience even more serious complications.** Polansky leaves the mothers with funds to buy food and telephone cards to keep in touch with him and their families in the camps.

Two days later, Polansky receives a call from the hospital demanding he return and pick up the RAE IDPs. If he isn't there by noon, they will be thrown out into the street. Serbian families whose children are being treated in the hospital do not want Gypsies there. Polansky calls ICRC for help. They tell him to contact their office in Belgrade.

Polansky drives with his caravan to Belgrade. He calls the ICRC head of mission. The ICRC director tells Polansky that it is a holiday in Serbia so the head administrator won't be there to make out the bill (Serbian hospitals will not discharge patients unless the bill has been paid). Polansky goes to the hospital and finds several mothers and their children already in the street. The hospital matron is getting the others ready to leave. There is no bill to pay. The hospital just wants to get rid of the Gypsies.

A way is again found to get them back to Kosovo. Funded by the same Jewish philanthropist, Polansky produces a film (Gypsy Blood) and a book (UN-Leaded Blood) about the tragedy in the camps. *He also asks European Roma Rights Center (ERRC) to file a lawsuit in the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR), Strasbourg against UNMIK. ERRC14 sends a lawyer - Dianne Post - to Kosovo to investigate and later file a lawsuit (see legal chronology in KMEG dossier).*

***The Human Rights Court in Strasbourg rejects the lawsuit saying that only a country, not an organization, can be sued. Dianne Post, an American lawyer, leaves the ERRC, and begins negotiations with UNMIK seeking compensation for the victims of lead poisoning. Initially, UNMIK accept responsibility and discuss various forms of compensation, but later withdraw and stonewall all further approaches.***

By this time, 28 IDPs have died in the camps. All had high lead levels or members of their families had life-threatening lead levels. *Doctors consulted say that this indicates that lead poisoning contributed to their deaths by damaging their immune systems making them more vulnerable to infection.* UNMIK now begins to accuse the IDPs of poisoning themselves by smelting car batteries.

*Society for Threatened Peoples (STP), a German NGO whom Polansky represents in Kosovo, brings Klaus Runow, one of Germany's leading experts on lead poisoning to Kosovo to take hair samples of the children in the camps. His samples are analyzed by a laboratory in Chicago, Doctor's Data, Inc<sup>9</sup>.*

**Runow's assessment of the hair samples can be found in KMEG's dossier.**

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<sup>9</sup> [http://www.doctorsdata.com/test\\_info.asp?id=2](http://www.doctorsdata.com/test_info.asp?id=2)

Not only are some of the highest lead levels in medical history found in the children's results, but so is the presence of 36 other highly toxic elements that are not found in car batteries (but are found on the wasteland on which the UN camps were built).

***Twice during 2005, WHO-Bonn (Germany) send a global expert on lead toxicity, Harvard Professor Dr. Rohko Kim to Kosovo to advise UNMIK on the lead poisoning. Dr. Kim finds many children in the camps with lead levels never previously reported in the medical literature. He recommends evacuation but UNMIK say that it is logistically impossible. Despite the mounting evidence, the UN Secretary General's Special Representative, Søren Jessen Petersen, refuses to take remedial action. Dr. Kim is told not to speak to the press or give interviews about the lead poisoning, but the STP team is subsequently able to obtain helpful insight from Dr. Kim.***

## **2006**

Reporters from *Bild Zeitung*, Germany's largest circulation daily newspaper come to Kosovo to write about the tragedy. Polansky introduces them to a Romani family, Shaban Mustafa and his seven children : Kasandra (5), Denis (8), Zejnija (8), Suada (10) , Shkurta (12), Serdjan (14), Semrana (15). The children's mother, Rukija Mustafa, died July 13, 2005, after giving birth to a stillborn child. Two of the seven surviving children have the highest lead levels ever in recorded.

Polansky believes they will not live much longer and asks the reporters to help save them. *Bild Zeitung* and the "A Heart for Children" foundation<sup>10</sup> (Ein Herz für Kinder, supported by the Society for Threatened Peoples (STP) agrees to take the family to Germany and donates money to get their birth certificates, passports and plane tickets. Despite the medical emergency, the German government office in Pristinë/Priština will only grant visas to two of the children. The German television channel ZDF - Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen, who are also interested in the story, call top German officials in Berlin and get visas for all eight members of the family, who fly to Germany with Polansky and his team.

***For the next six months, they are treated by Klaus Runow, a German specialist in heavy metal toxicity, at a special clinic in Bad Emstal. Before treatment, all the children are given a body scan at a special clinic in Bad Wildungen. When seven-year-old Denis is in the body scan, the German doctors point out his liver to Polansky and tell him that Denis's liver resembles that of a 60-year-old alcoholic drinking a bottle of whiskey a day. The doctors say Denis is likely to die before the age of 20. Irreversible organ and brain damage is evident in all seven children.***

Polansky himself and his staff are also treated for lead poisoning in Germany. Despite only spending a few hours/week in the camps, their lead levels are double the level liable to cause brain damage. Aljezeera TV film the body scans of the Mustafa children and later air a program about the camps and featuring the only family to be evacuated and receive medical treatment.

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.ein-herz-fuer-kinder.de/>

**Finally admitting that the camps are located on highly toxic waste, UNMIK decides to bow to international pressure and take some steps to try to convince the public they are dealing with the lead pollution.** After French KFOR abandon their base at Osterode camp, a few meters from the contaminated camps at Kablar/Kablare and Çesmin Llug/Česmin Lug, UNMIK requests funding from the German government (500,000 Euros) to remodel Osterode to house all the RAE families from Zhitkovc/Žitkovac, Kablar/Kablare and Česmin Lug/Çesmin Llug. UNMIK refuse to consider reports that the French military doctors have told all their soldiers not to father a child for nine months after leaving Osterode because of the soldier's high lead levels while serving there.

*Believing that the main source of the toxicity is the ground that the camp is built on (rather than atmospheric pollution, as first reported in 2000 in Dr. Andreyew's report), UNMIK cement over the land at Osterode camp. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) based in Atlanta, Georgia, conduct their own assessment, and subsequently declare the camp "lead safe." However, KMEG notes that **the CDC at the same time called for the immediate closure of the Česmin Lug/Çesmin Llug camp, citing the very high levels of exposure to toxic pollutants.** Three years later, the Director of CDC, Bush-appointed Dr. Julie Gerberding, will be forced to resign after being accused of – amongst other things - manipulating medical tests to conform with political agendas.<sup>11</sup>*

Obviously aware that most of the lead poisoning in the camps comes from the windblown dust of the nearby toxic waste heaps, the **UN Secretary General's new Special Representative for UNMIK, Joachim Rücker, announces during his first press conference that Camp Osterode, has been refurbished and is now supposedly not "lead safe" but "lead safer."** He says that all the IDPs will be evacuated from the three camps, Zhitkovc/Žitkovac, Kablar/Kablare and Çesmin Llug/Česmin Lug to Osterode camp. (this follows Polansky's accusation that the US Government Office in Prishtinë/Priština (USOP) has offered hundreds of thousands of dollars to Kosovo Albanians for tuberculosis and AIDS but nothing at all for the lead poisoning of the RAE IDPs.

Nevertheless, the "United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) emphasizes - in 2006 - that Camp Osterode "is an interim solution, it is not a permanent solution. **The health situation of all of the residents, particularly the young children in the camps, is intolerable and really one of the worst health crises that we have in this part of Europe.**"<sup>12</sup>

*This confirms what the IDPs believed all along- they don't believe that Osterode is any safer for their children especially after spokespersons for WHO and CDC*

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<sup>11</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Julie\\_Gerberding](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Julie_Gerberding) (For further information on CDC, view the current director's profile at: <http://www.cdc.gov/about/leadership/director.htm>)

<sup>12</sup> United Nations Daily Highlights, 06-02-16 See quotes by the Principal Deputy Special Representative of the UN Secretary General in Kosovo, Larry Rossin and Marc Danzon, the Regional Director for Europe of the World Health Organisation <http://www.hri.org/news/world/undh/2006/06-02-16.undh.html>

*publicly state that there is no safe level of lead for children. The IDPs demand to be taken abroad and provided with medical treatment like the Mustafa family, and as a consequence, they refuse to move to the Osterode camp.* Then, a mysterious fire breaks out at Kablar/Kablare destroying most of the barracks, and the IDPs are thus forced to move to Osterode. Over the next three months, all the families leave Zhitkovc/Žitkovac because they are promised free food and a better diet that will lower lead levels at Osterode. Only the IDPs in Çesmin Llug/Česmin Lug remain in their barracks. Although there is no public announcement, the US Government Office in Prishtinë/Priština (current Ambassador Ms. Tina Kaidanow) donates \$800,000 to fund food and medical treatment for the IDPs now living in Osterode.

WHO tells the US office that a better diet will lower lead levels. This type of treatment for lead poisoning is called the "Milwaukee Study." That study showed that lead levels can be lowered by as much as 20% by eating mainly fresh fruit and fresh vegetables - *but crucially, only after the affected persons are removed from the source of poisoning.* Random blood tests are taken of children at Osterode and Çesmin Llug/Česmin Lug.

## 2007

In 2007, the CDC releases a new report<sup>13</sup> of lead poisoning at camps, citing a Mr. Barry Brooks as the person in charge of the testing. **The report's recommendations still do not call for an immediate medical evacuation, despite critical medical evidence to the contrary.** The IDPs in both camps claim that WHO refuses to show them the results of all the blood tests taken twice per year since 2005.

Norwegian Church Aid, the official administrators of the camps since 2005, complain when UNMIK stop all food aid, saying the funds from the US office have run out.

**More blood tests are taken, but WHO refuse to make them public, telling the USOP (United States Office in Prishtinë/Priština, now the US embassy) that the blood tests show that the lead levels have dropped considerably in Osterode. Polansky obtains all the blood tests taken since 2005 from a WHO staff member determined to expose his agency's cover-up. The tests suggest that from 2006 to 2007, the lead levels in several children have actually increased, and that overall, the children in Osterode have higher lead levels than the children living in the old camp of Česmin Llug/Çesmin Llug<sup>7</sup>.**

During the course of the year, Norwegian Church Aid and other donors build 24 apartments and several small homes in the old RAE settlement in south Mitrovicë/Mitrovica. Despite the overwhelming evidence of the effects of toxic poisoning up to this point at the camps, only 8 apartments are given to the vulnerable IDPs from the camps themselves, and the other apartments are given to Romani, Ashkali and Egyptian refugees coming back from Montenegro and

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<sup>13</sup> <http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/lead/publications/Kosovoreport.pdf>

Serbia. This allows UNHCR to demonstrate that its “minorities return policy” works. UNMIK promises that more apartments will be built.

However, the eight families that do move back to their old neighbourhood find life difficult and are afraid to live near Albanians who chased them out in 1999 and then looted and burned their homes. These eight families are forced to move back and forth between the camp and their new apartments. During their many years under UNHCR care, the Romani, Ashkali and Egyptian IDPs have never been treated for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which most, if not all are likely to have experienced.

The medical team that was supposed to monitor the “better diet” and chelation treatment with pills quit their jobs because they haven’t been paid for months. More than 60,000 Euros worth of chelation pills goes unused in the camps. Dr. Zoran Savic, in charge of the chelation treatment, stops the project, stating that the medical treatment is actually harming the children because they are being treated on the source of poisoning.

Because there is no heating in Osterode (families are not allowed to have wood burning stoves), many children in Osterode fall sick during the winter. Families who remained in Çesmin Llug/Česmin Lug do not face this problem because they do have wood burning stoves. Most families are once again forced to find their food in the city’s garbage containers.

In July 2007, chelation treatment for the camp children is stopped as a result of a strike by the medical staff who claim they haven’t been paid for months, and by Dr. Savic’s insistence that the treatment is doing more harm than good. A camp nurse paid by the camp management continues to work three hours/day at Osterode, looking after the general health of the general health of the IDPs, but not their lead poisoning treatment.

In September 2008, the IDPs in Leposaviq/Leposavić are forced to move by Serbs plans to build a sports facility on the site of the camp. Romani activists ask American lawyer Dianne Post to assist a letter-writing campaign in protest against this proposal.

Paul Polansky publishes several articles in the Prishtinë/Priština press and international publications about the lead poisoning tragedy. In order to drum up international support he undertakes a speaking tour in the United States. In Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where a Jewish philanthropist has funded Polansky’s work and publications, Polansky meets the rabbi sister of Senator Feingold. Appalled by Polansky’s speech and documentary film about the lead poisoning tragedy, she urges Polansky to contact her brother.

Over the next six months Polansky and several members of the Milwaukee Jewish community write letters to Senator Feingold begging him to put Polansky in contact with the American ambassador in Prishtinë/Priština who refuses to meet Polansky to discuss the tragedy. Senator Feingold does not answer any of the letters.

## 2008

An international advocacy group, known as the Kosovo Medical Emergency Group (KMEG), is formed to publicize the plight of the IDPs in the UN camps. ***The group – whose purpose is to push for an immediate medical evacuation - begins a press campaign and makes public the report from 2000, as well as all blood tests from 2004 to 2008 which WHO and UNMIK have refused to share with even the families in the camps.***

In the Fall of 2008, Polansky, representing KMEG and Society for Threatened Peoples (STP), gives presentations to Members of the European Parliament in Brussels, and Members of Parliament in London and a half-hour filmed presentation to the Irish Subcommittee on Foreign Affairs in Dublin.

USAID awards Mercy Corps, an American international NGO, a grant of US \$2,400,000 to resettle 50 camp families (out of 148) over the next two and a half years despite the fact that Mercy Corps has never worked with Roma in the camps before. The tender submitted by Danish Refugee Council who have worked closely with the Roma, is passed over by USAID. Norwegian Church Aid, the only other NGO who have worked closely with the camp Roma, do not tender for the contract because they consider DRC to be the best qualified to work with the camp Roma.

KMEG protests that such programs will not save the camp's inhabitants. What is needed is an immediate medical solution. KMEG members demand from UNMIK to proceed with the immediate evacuation of the camps and provision for medical treatment - preferably abroad - since there are no facilities in Kosovo to house and treat the more than 500 IDPs. On 12 May, 2008, UNMIK officially turns over the three camps (Osterode camp, Česmin Lug/Çesmin Llug and Leposaviq/Leposavić) to the Kosovo government.

Despite direct appeals by KMEG members to the Kosovo Minister of Health, neither he, nor any member of his staff, are willing to pay a visit to the camps. However, WHO carries out more blood tests, which show that lead levels especially in the children remain high or are increasing. Several children still have lead levels in excess of the maximum level that the lead care analyser can measure.

In August 2008, the Ombudsperson for Kosovo opens an investigation into human rights abuses by UNMIK/UNHCR in the IDP camps in north Mitrovicë/Mitrovica following a formal complaint from Polansky. Hilmi Jashari, the Kosova Acting Ombudsperson at the time, promises a result by September but is silenced by the Kosovo government contact ceases with anyone who enquires about the investigation.

KMEG (Kosovo Medical Emergency Group) gets a UK-based NGO (Hope and Aid Direct) to take several truckloads of aid to the camps. A major UK-based law firm (Leigh Day & Co) works closely with American attorney Dianne Post in her legal action against the United Nations, seeking compensation for the RAE families who have suffered for nine years under UN negligence.



As the year ends, it is noted that 78 RAE had died in the camps since Nov 1999, their lives foreshortened by the severe damage caused to their health by toxic conditions in the camps.

MEP Baroness Emma Nicholson sends a letter to Dr. Bernard Kouchner in November 2008 reminding him of his pledge in the Fall of 1999 – when she herself had made a visit to the Kosovan IDP camps and he was the UN's Special Representative there – to close down the toxic camps and evacuate the families within 45 days. She expresses her dismay at the camps remaining open and urges Dr. Kouchner to take action.

Dr. Kouchner responds in December 2008 expressing personal concern and giving a number of unspecified, diplomatic assurances, among them the statement that he is contacting the EU and his French ambassador in Kosovo to look into the situation (see KMEG dossier for correspondence between Dr. Kouchner and Baroness Nicholson).

Katalin Barsony, a Hungarian Romani documentary filmmaker, who is the founder of *Mundi Romani* makes a film about the plight of the RAE in the North Mitrovicë/Mitrovica camps. The film, *TRAPPED*<sup>14</sup>, an award-winning documentary, is shown at several film festivals throughout Europe, raising awareness amongst a broader community. Barsony visits Çesmin Llug/Çesmin Lug and Osterode camp again in December 2008 to update and revise the film (with particular reference to the number of deaths in the camps which have now reached 80), and plans to launch it on YouTube.

In a filmed interview, the three camp leaders thank Polansky for his presentations in Brussels, London and Dublin, calling on him to continue to represent them in seeking evacuation and medical treatment for their people. They say this is their main priority, the only way to save their children. That their children are their greatest treasure.

## **2009 January**

The Leposaviq/Leposavić camp has not been forced (see 2007 above) to move, but a new fence has been put up on the left side as you enter. Dianne Post, the US attorney on a return visit to the region, asks Romani leaders about the fence and is informed that it is part of a deal aimed at preventing the forcible eviction of all the occupants. The camp leaders agreed to the city erecting the fence and the sport facility was built elsewhere.

A local Albanian NGO based in Prishtinë/Priština called the Kosovo Agency for Advocacy and Development (KAAD) is contracted by the Kosovo government to replace Norwegian Church Aid in administering the RAE camps in north Mitrovicë/Mitrovica. The budget for running the camps, now under the aegis of the Kosovo Ministry of Communities and Returns, is cut by 74%. Funding covers the maintenance of minimum services at Osterode camp; no funds are provided for the running of Çesmin Llug/Çesmin Lug. Distribution of food packages,

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<sup>14</sup> [http://www.mundiromani.com/about\\_us/?film\[film\]\[keyvalue\]=31 - film](http://www.mundiromani.com/about_us/?film[film][keyvalue]=31 - film)

previously provided by the international community to help reduce lead levels in the camps and combat malnutrition is discontinued.

The Kosovo Medical Emergency Group (KMEG) begins to prepare a dossier to send to heads of states and influential politicians to call their attention to this tragedy, **demanding immediate evacuation and medical intervention**. On Friday, Jan 29th, 2009, a press conference is held in Prishtinë/Priština where Dr. Dorit Nitzan, Head of the Lead Task Force at WHO Balkans Regional Office, calls for closure of the camps, and declares that the area on which the camps were built is unfit for human habitation due to high levels of toxicity.

Although WHO's press release notes the high level of toxicity, **it does not call for an immediate medical evacuation**, but instead calls for the urgent closure of camps as soon as possible, a call that has constantly fallen on deaf ears since 2000. The *International Herald Tribune* publishes a short piece on the WHO press conference, which calls for closing down the Çesmin Llug/Česmin Lug camp<sup>15</sup>.

Although KMEG welcomes WHO's initiative to secure a safer and healthier future for the IDPs, we would like to point out that some of the information in the press release might have been factually incorrect and misleading to the public. Firstly, there are not just 100 families residing in the camps. There are a total of 148, and sometimes over 150 families when some choose to return from the South Mahalla.

WHO also did not explicitly point out how premature and avoidable deaths could result from severe damage to human immune systems through long-term exposure to lead. Once immune systems are weakened, people are more susceptible to death from otherwise curable illnesses.

KMEG has the names of the over 80 people who have died in the camps since 1999, well in excess of 10 apparently mentioned by a WHO official visiting the camps. Norwegian Church Aid (NCA) the camps' administrators from 2005 to 2008, admit that no death records were ever kept in any of the camps. The only list of those who died in the camps was kept by Polansky and his team, who attended most of the funerals and helped with funeral expenses. (No UN staff member or camp administrator ever attended the funeral of a child or adult who died in the camps).

BBC TV make a short program about the tragedy in the camps. UNHCR refuses to be interviewed for the program. Their spokesperson in Prishtinë/Priština states UNHCR have turned the camps over to the Kosovo government, hence the UN has no further interest in these camps or the inhabitants.

## **2009: February 2**

Paul Polansky meets with Latif Masvarica, the leader of the Çesmin Llug/Česmin Lug camp. He informs Polansky that all families from the Çesmin Llug/Česmin Lug camp who moved to the south mahalla have moved back, as they are afraid to live and work there. The families who moved to the south mahalla from

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<sup>15</sup> <http://www.iht.com/articles/ap/2009/01/31/europe/EU-Kosovo-Roma-Camps.php>

Osterode all want to come back for the same reasons, but the administrators at Osterode won't give them their barracks back.

Polansky begins filming with an Australian TV crew for a 25-minute documentary on the situation in the camps.

Society for Threatened Peoples (STP) address the Foreign and Europe Ministers of the 27 EU countries as well as the OHCHR and the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the right to health and demands the immediate evacuation and medical treatment of all those living in the camps.

### **2009: March**

A delegation of the STP Switzerland visited the camps and had several meetings with central stakeholders like Kosovos Minister of Health, Alush Gashi.

For the first time a solemn vigil was held in the camps.

A first international strategy meeting was held in Bern with members of the KMEG Group and STP.

### **2009: April**

On 11th April 2009 Ergin Salihi, a nine year old boy from the Osterode camp, was sent to Kraguevac hospital in critical condition with damaged kidneys. Prof. Dr. Anelka Stojkovic-Anelkovic who examined Ergin stated he was suffering from Nephritic syndrome caused in her opinion from malnutrition. However, she was not aware that Ergin has lived all his life on toxic wasteland in a former UN camp and that his blood lead levels – twice measured by the WHO – were higher than their instrument could measure. After Ergin was sent to the Mitrovica hospital and when his condition got worse, he was sent to a hospital in Belgrade. But there, the doctors refused to do more blood tests or treat Ergin for leadpoisoning.

### **Mai: May**

UNDP appointed Kim Vetting as the new person in charge for the evacuation of the camps. The Kosovo government are planning to build 180 new houses for the IDP families in north Mitrovica till the end of august 09. The Australian TV broadcasted a 20 min documentary film about the situation of the IDP's camps in North Mitrovica.

Note – By June, his position had been terminated and not refilled.

Ergin was sent back to Osterode. Because his food supply consists only of garbage leftovers and he is exposed to the lead again, it is feared that he won't survive, even though he is receiving some supplements in the form of fruit and vegetables. Meanwhile, the health of another child Sara Jahorovic, has deteriorated.

[Return to Top](#)

[Return to Contents](#)

## STATEMENT OF CAMP LEADERS REPRESENTING THE FAMILIES

Our Campaign believes that too much has been done without taking these fully into account. Pressures have been applied incorrectly to force the families in certain directions in which they feel fearful, concerned about security, education for their children, work opportunities, involvement in institutions or freedom of movement.

Note: This is an authentic document but signatures and contact details have been removed to protect identities but are available to key decision makers.

[Go to Translation](#)

### KOME SE UPUCUJE

Mi, dole potpisani, Lideri smo izbeglickih kampova Osterode, Cesmin i Leposavic na Severu Kosova. Kolektivno, predstavljamo od oko 200 porodica (oko 600 ljudi).

U Junu 1999, posle dolaska NATO snaga, bili smo izjurenjeni od Albanaca u juznom delu Kosovske Mitrovice. Tada smo ziveli u Fabrickoj mahali, koja je bila najveca Romska zajednica na Kosovu koja je imala od oko 1,000 kuca I oko 8,000 ljudi.

Iako je mnogo nasih rodjaka otislo u inostranstvu, nekih 40 nasih porodica su nasli mesto u vojnom remontu/hangaru u Leposavicu dok su ostale porodice zauzele praznu skolu u Severnom delu Mitrovice. U Septembru, UNHCR nas je iz skole premestio u satorima na otrovanom otpadnom zemljistu u selu Zitkovac.

Dr. Bernard Kouchner je posetio nase satore u Zitkovcu, krajem Septembra I obecao da cemo biti preseljeni od ovog trovanog zemljista za 45 dana; da cemo biti vrateni nasim kucama ili da ce nas odvesti u inostranstvu kao izbeglice.

Nazalost, u Januaru 2000 pola nas su bili smesteni u konstruktivnim barakama na vecem zagadjenom mestu blizu Trepcine otpadne gomile na Severu Mitrovice, dok su ostali bili zbrinuti u istim barakama koji su obezbedjeni od strane UNHCR i implementacionog partnera ACT, na otrovnom zemljistu u Zitkovcu.

Leta 2000 Dr. Kouchner je naredio njegovom UN medicinskom timu da ispitaju situaciju olovne zagadjenosti u regionu Mitrovice I nasli najvecu kolicinu otrovna na zemljistu bas tamo gde su Cesmin Lug I Zitkovac izgradjeni. Njegov UN medicinski savetnik Dr. Andrej Andrejew predlozio je hitnu evakuaciju nasih kampova. Cinjenica je da su testovi krvi nase dece imali toliko veliku kolicinu olova da Belgijska laboratorija koja je primila krvne uzorke, zatrazila je da se ovakvi testovi ponovo urade kako bi potvrdili da su nasli najvecu kolicinu olova u krvi coveka, ikad registrovanu u medicinskoj istoriji.

Bez obzira na preporuku njegovog medicinskog tima, Dr. Kouchner nije pratio medicinsku proceduru I nije evakuisao nas kamp.

U Decembru 2004 Svetska Zdravstvena Organizacija (WHO) I Medjunarodni Crveni Krst (ICRC) preporucio je hitnu evakuaciju nasih kampova posle novih testova krvi koji su pokazali da mnoga deca imaju najvece kolicine olova koje su ikad zabelezene u medicinskoj istoriji. Tada su nekoliko nasa deca umrla. Doktori koji su bliski sa njihovim simptomima rekli su da je trovanje olovom uzrok njihove smrti.

U 2006, Zitkovac kamp je bio zatvoren I te porodice su premestene, po pretpostavci, u olovno-bezbednom kampu zvanom Osterode.

Ipak, nedavni testovi krvi dva kampa (Cesmin Lug I Osterode), pokazuju da jos uvek imaju velike kolicine olova u krvi. Medjunarodni doktori su nas upozorili da svako dete koji se rodi u bilo kom kampu bice rođeno sa neizlecivim oštećenjem mozga I nece ziveti mnogo kako bih dočekali jos jednu generaciju, kao ocevi.

Januara 31, 2009 Svetska Zdravstvena Organizacija (WHO) sa Regionalnom kancelarijom za Evropu jos jednom su opomenuli da se kampovi hitno evakuisu.

Do sada samo je jedna porodica spasena iz nasih kampova. U 2006 godini, 8 dece porodice Mustafa I njihov otac su medicinski evakuisani za Nemacku, kada je njihova trudna majka umrla od trovanja olovom. Tamo, oni nastavljaju njihova medicinska lecenja I dobijaju smestaj. Nemacki doktori kazu da da je potrebno oko 10 godina sa redovnim lecenjem kako bih se olovo izbacilo iz njihovih kostiju I tela.

Sve porodice u Cesmin Lug, Osterode I Leposavic zahtevaju istu ovakvu evakuaciju, urgentno medicinsko lecenje I smestaj bas kao I porodica Mustafa. Nasa deca, takodje, moraju biti spasena.

**[Go to Translation](#)**



## **STATEMENT BY CAMP LEADERS**

### **TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN**

We, the undersigned, are leaders of the refugee camps of Osterode, Çesmin Llug/Česmin Lug and Leposaviq/Leposavić, in northern Kosovo. We represent approx. 200 families (numbering roughly 600 people).

In June 1999, after the arrival of NATO forces, we were chased out by Albanians living in the southern part of the town of Kosovska Mitrovicë/Mitrovica. We used to live in the Fabricka quarter of Kosovska Mitrovicë/Mitrovica. Our Roma community was the largest Roma community in Kosovo, with approximately 1,000 homes housing 8,000 people.

Though many of our relatives went abroad, some 40 of our community's families found refuge in a military hangar/warehouse located in Leposaviq/Leposavić. Others took up an abandoned school in northern Kosovska Mitrovicë/Mitrovica. In September of 1999, UNHCR moved the families from the school into tents located on a contaminated rubbish dump in the village of Zhitkovc/Žitkovac.

Dr. Bernard Kouchner visited our tent camp in Zhitkovc/Žitkovac at the end of September 1999. He promised that we would be moved from the contaminated land within 45 days, either back to our homes, or abroad as refugees.

Unfortunately, in January 2000 half of us were then re-housed into makeshift shacks in located on a larger plot of land – which was also contaminated – near the Trepçina waste dump in northern Kosovska Mitrovicë/Mitrovica, while the rest were housed in similar shacks provided for by UNHCR and its implementing partner ACT – on the contaminated land in Zhitkovc/Žitkovac.

In the summer of 2000, Dr. Kouchner ordered his UN medical team to assess the extent of lead contamination in the Mitrovicë/Mitrovica region. They found the highest quantities of lead contamination exactly where Çesmin Llug/Česmin Lug and Zhitkovc/Žitkovac had been built. His UN medical adviser, Dr. Andrej Andrejew, recommended that our camps be evacuated immediately. The fact that the blood tests carried out on our children showed that they had very high levels of lead in their blood led the Belgian laboratory – which had initially carried out the tests – to request that the tests be repeated to be able to confirm that they had come across the highest lead-poisoning levels in medical history.

Despite the recommendations of his medical team, Dr. Kouchner did not follow through on the medical recommendations, and he did not evacuate our camp.

In December 2004 the World Health Organisation and the International Red Cross recommended that our camps be evacuated following new tests which indicated that many of the children in our camps have the highest lead-poisoning



levels ever registered in medical history. At that time a number of our children had died. Doctors who were aware of their symptoms stated that lead-poisoning was the cause of their deaths.

In 2006, the Zhitkovc/Žitkovac camp was closed and the families living there were moved into a supposedly lead-free camp called Osterode.

Nevertheless, recent blood tests carried out at Çesmin Llug/Česmin Lug and Osterode indicate that lead levels in our blood continue to be high. International doctors have warned us that each child born in the camp will be born with incurable brain damage, and that they will not be able to live long enough to ensure that another generation is born, as their fathers did.

On 31 January 2009, the World Health Organization and its Regional Office for Europe reiterated that the camps should be evacuated as a matter of urgency.

Up until now, only one family has been saved from our camps. In 2006, seven of the children of the Mustafa family and their father were evacuated by a medical team to Germany, following the death of the children's pregnant mother. They still continue to receive medical treatment and housing. German doctors have said that they will need roughly 10 years of continuous medical treatment to be able to completely remove the lead from their bones and bodies.

All the families of Çesmin Llug/Česmin Lug Osterode and Leposaviq/Leposavić require the same kind of evacuation, urgent medical treatment and housing – the same as that received by the Mustafas. Our children also have to be saved.

Signed,

Representatives of the three IDPs (The signatures and contact details for the representatives have been removed to protect the identities) but are available to Key Decision Makers on request.

[Return to Top](#)

[Return to Contents](#)

## **PRESENTATIONS IN BRUSSELS, LONDON, & DUBLIN**

Paul Polansky, December 2008

Two hours from London by plane, in Eastern Europe, are two death camps, mainly for children under the age of six years. If these children don't die by the age of six, they will have irreversible brain damage for the rest of their short lives.

These camps have been running for nine years. They were built on the tailing stands of the biggest lead mine in Europe, and next to a toxic slagheap of 100 million tons. These camps (there used to be four) were built by the UN administration in Kosovo and their implementing partner Action by Churches Working Together. The hurriedly assembled barracks were also built with old lead painted boards.

To date 80 people have died in these camps, mainly due to complications from lead poisoning. More than 50 women have also aborted because of the lead poisoning. One woman and her baby died at childbirth. During her pregnancy she was being treated for lead poisoning. After her death it was discovered by a well-known laboratory in Chicago that two of her surviving nine children has the highest lead levels in medical history.

According to medical experts from Germany and the United States who have visited the camps, every child conceived in these camps will be born with irreversible brain damage.

These two UN death camps are not a new story although the deaths keep rising. In April 2005, I wrote about them in the International Herald Tribune. Shortly thereafter, ZDF (German TV) did a short feature program about the camps as did Al-Jazeera. Bild Zeitung, German's largest newspaper not only told the story, but also took seven children (after their mother and baby brother had died of lead poisoning) to Germany for medical treatment where body scans showed the children had damaged organs and irreversible brain damage.

This is how it happened.

On June 16, 1999, four days after NATO troops arrived, roving bands of extremist Albanians, led by black-uniformed Kosovo Liberation Army officers, attacked almost every Gypsy community in Kosovo. The Gypsies were told to flee or they would be killed. Out of a pre-war population of about 130,000, more than 100,000 Gypsies during the next three months fled Kosovo. After they left, more than 14,000 Gypsy homes were looted and then destroyed.

NATO troops refused to intervene, saying this was a problem for the local police. But there were no local police at that time. The Serbs had been the local police and they had been forced by NATO to withdraw to Serbia.

I personally witnessed part of this diaspora because in July 1999 the UN asked me to volunteer to go to Kosovo and advise them on their Gypsy problems. For three months I was the only non-Gypsy living 24 hours/day in the UN's largest camp, by Obilić-Obiliq. During the day I often drove to where Gypsies were being threatened. I especially visited the largest Gypsy community in Kosovo, in south Mitrovicë/Mitrovica. There a community of more than 8,000 Gypsies (Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians) living in more than 1,000 homes were being forced out while NATO troops stood by and watched. Most of these Mitrovicë/Mitrovica Gypsies fled abroad. About 1,000 sought refuge in a Serbian schoolhouse closed for the summer. For the next few months I arranged water and food through several aid agencies for these Gypsies who were camped out in the schoolhouse.

In November 1999, UNHCR took charge of these schoolhouse Gypsies and moved them to four hurriedly built camps on toxic wasteland, the only places the UN said were available. I protested, calling attention to UN officials and especially to the head of UNHCR in Prishtinë/Priština, that these toxic wastelands could be detrimental to the health of these IDPs (internally displaced people). UNHCR assured me that they had signed contracts with the local municipalities that these IDPs would be in these camps for only 45 days. At the end of 45 days, they would either have their homes rebuilt and moved back or would be taken as refugees to another country. Unfortunately, after almost nine years and many deaths due to lead poisoning, these IDPs are still living on toxic wasteland.

During the summer of 2000, the UN health officer for Mitrovicë/Mitrovica was asked by the UN administrator Dr. Bernard Kouchner to do a medical survey of Mitrovicë/Mitrovica because so many UN police and French soldiers were found to have high levels of lead in their blood. In November 2000, the UN health officer Dr. Andrej Andrejew's report was presented to UNMIK (the United Nations Mission in Kosovo) stating that most people living in the city of Mitrovicë/Mitrovica were suffering from lead poisoning. The report stated that the worst effected were the Gypsies living in the UN camps and recommended that the camps be evacuated and the areas fenced off so that the general public could not accidentally wander in. Dr. Bernard Kouchner, the present Foreign Minister of France, told his staff he was a medical doctor and understood the danger of lead poisoning. He promised to take appropriate measures. But the only thing he did was to close the smelter at nearby Trepca mines. He did not evacuate and close the Gypsy camps as recommended by the report, although the lead levels in the camps were three to four times higher than the general population.

Instead of closing the Gypsy camps, the UN built a 1.5-kilometer jogging track between two of the camps and the toxic slag heaps. The UN put up signs in four languages calling this jogging track the Alley of Health. The UN also built on land next to 100 million tons of toxic waste a soccer field and a basketball court for the Gypsy children. They were not told that exercise, opening the lungs, would make them more vulnerable to lead poisoning.

Despite repeated appeals to help the Gypsies, especially those living in the three camps in the area of north Mitrovicë/Mitrovica, the UN did just the opposite. All food aid was suspended in 2002 saying it was time for the Gypsies to find their

own supplies. In the Zhitkovc/Žitkovac camp the running water was cut off for up to six months at a time because the camp administer, Churches Working Together, felt the Gypsies were using too much water. In the end, the Zhitkovc/Žitkovac Gypsies had to walk four kilometers twice a day to get their drinking water. In all three camps, most of the Gypsies had to go through the local garbage cans to find their food.

In the summer of 2004, WHO made a special investigation of lead poisoning in the three camps after Jenita Mehmeti, a four-year-old girl, died of lead poisoning. She was not the first. Up to that point 28 people (mainly children and young adults) had died in the three camps, but Jenita was the first one to be treated for lead poisoning before she died. New blood samples taken by WHO showed that many children, the most vulnerable to lead poisoning, had lead levels higher than WHO's analyzer could register.

The standard procedure for medical treatment of lead poisoning requires immediate evacuation from the source of poisoning and hospitalization if lead levels are above 40 µg/dL. Irreversible brain damage usually begins at 10 µg/dL especially in children under the age of six whose immune systems have yet to develop. Many of the lead levels of the Gypsy children in these three camps were over 65 µg/dL, the highest level the WHO machine could read. WHO staff suspected that some children (because of their symptoms) had lead levels in the 80s and 90s. As it turned out, two children had a lead level of 120 µg/dL, the highest in medical history.

In November 2004, WHO presented their health report on the Gypsy camps to UNMIK, recommending immediate evacuation. Although there were precedents for the UN evacuating thousands of Albanians and Serbians in Kosovo when they faced life-threatening events, these Gypsies were not evacuated. The only measure that the UN took was to being bi-monthly meetings with UN agencies and other NGOs to study the problem. Although many NGOs including the International Committee for the Red Cross petitioned the UN to immediately evacuate these "death camps" within 24 hours, no action was taken by the UN until 2006.

In January 2006 the UN in Kosovo closed one of the Gypsy camps and moved 35 families to a new location, about 50 meters from their old camp. The new camp was called Osterode. It was formerly a French army NATO base in north Mitrovicë/Mitrovica but had been abandoned after many soldiers were found to have lead poisoning. In fact, all French soldiers serving there were told by French military doctors not to father a child for nine months after leaving the camp because of the high lead levels in their blood.

Nevertheless, the UN in their wisdom spent more than 500,000 euros (donated by the German government) to refurbish this camp. Feeling that most of the lead poisoning came from the ground, the UN cemented over much of the area and then obtained a certificate from CDC, the Center for Disease Control, a US funded agency, that the camp was "lead safe." Although all these camps were built on the tailing stands of the Trepca lead mines, most of the lead pollution comes through the air from the 100 million tons of toxic slag heaps in front of the camps.

In September 2006, at his first press conference as head of the UN in Kosovo, Herr Joachim Ruecker proudly announced that the UN was doing something to help these Gypsies dying of lead poisoning. In addition to moving them from their camps to Osterode camp, which he declared was not lead safe but "lead safer" the UN would begin to treat lead poisoning with a better diet. For the first time in four years food aid would now be given to the Gypsies so that they would no longer have to go through the local garbage cans. The US office in Prishtinë/Priština donated \$1,000,000 for this "better diet."

It is well known to medical doctors that a proper diet can lower lead levels by about 20%, but only if the affected person is first removed from the source of poisoning. In the case of these infected Gypsies, reducing their lead levels by 20% would still leave them with life-threatening levels. For the first time in four years, the UN also provided a daily medical staff to look after the health of these Gypsies. Unfortunately, lead poisoning can only be treated once the patient is removed from the source of lead poisoning. In any event, the medical staff later resigned because they had not been paid for months.

By spring 2006 two of the Gypsy camps (Žitkovc/Žitkovac and Kablar/Kablare) had been closed with more than 100 families now living in Osterode camp. After three months, blood samples were taken and according to UNMIK the health of the Gypsies was improving, thanks to their new diet, and lead levels were falling. However, WHO and UNMIK refused to share copies of these blood results with the public or even with the Gypsy families themselves. Later I was given copies of the tests by a disgruntled WHO staffer who was tired of the cover up. The test results showed that the lead levels had not only risen, but that Osterode, the lead free camp now had higher lead levels than the nine-year-old Çesmin Llug/Česmin Lug camp.

In 2006 the UN announced that the only solution for the Gypsies living on or near the toxic wastelands was to rebuild their homes in their old neighbourhood and move them back. Thus the UN enlisted several international donors to rebuild some of the Gypsy homes and several apartment blocks with the promise to move the lead-infected Gypsies back to their old neighbourhood. Unfortunately, as soon as these homes and apartments were finished in the summer and fall of 2006, the UN did not give all the apartments to the Gypsies living on toxic wasteland, but mainly to Kosovo Gypsy refugees the UN wanted to bring back from Serbia and Montenegro to show that their return policy of refugees was working.

In April 2007 all food and medical aid at Osterode camp was stopped because the UN said it was running out of money. Once again the Gypsies were forced to find their only food by going through the local garbage cans. But worst of all was yet to come.

Because many children at Osterode camp and in the adjoining camp of Çesmin Llug/Česmin Lug were showing common signs of lead poisoning (lead on their teeth, daily vomiting, and memory loss), the camp leaders insisted on new blood test in April 2008. Random blood tests of 105 children showed staggering

results. For many of the children living in the UN "lead safer" camp of Osterode, their lead levels had doubled since moving into the former French base.

Because the UN, UNHCR and UNHCHR refuse to help these citizens of Kosovo, I have appealed directly to the Minister of Health for the newly declared country of Kosovo. Dr. Alush Gashi is not only a medical doctor but also a personal friend of mine for several years. He once lived and worked in San Francisco. I not only appealed to him by email, but also visited him in his office, begging him to help his minority citizens. He understands the problem. He understands the situation. As a medical doctor he knows that these Gypsies need to be evacuated immediately. In a recently filmed interview with Dr. Gashi, he acknowledged that these Gypsies should be evacuated immediately, that they would be better off in prison than in the death camps. He said that USAID was funding a project with Mercy Corps to save these people.

It didn't take me long to get a copy of the USAID/Mercy Corp project. It called for the resettlement of 50 of the 120 families living in the camps over the next 2.5 years. There was no immediate medical solution for anyone living in the camps. Evacuation was not mentioned. Later I found out that the author of the project has never even visited the camps. Yet USAID is handing over \$2.4 million, for this cosmetic solution.

Since 2005 we have tried to force the UN to help these Gypsies. An American lawyer, Dianne Post, has tried to sue the UN on behalf of several hundred Gypsies living in these camps. Her lawsuit against the UN at the court of Human Rights in Strasbourg was turned down because the court declared that only a country, not an organization, could be sued. Although the UN was the sole administrator of Kosovo, the court decided that UN could not be sued.

The UN does have a policy of compensation for such problems. But UN lawyers for three years have refused to cooperate in seeking compensation for these Gypsies or resolving their health problems. The UN does not deny responsibility but refuses to comply with its own rules and standards.

In 2005 the Society for Threatened Peoples (STP)<sup>16</sup>, the largest NGO in Germany after the Red Cross, brought to Kosovo the leading German expert on toxic poisoning, Dr. Klaus Runow. Although the UN tried to bar him from the camps, he was able to take about 60 hair samples from the Gypsy children. He sent the hair samples to a well-known laboratory in Chicago. The results showed that not only did many of the children have the highest lead levels in medical history, but that all had toxic poisoning from 36 other heavy metals as well. In trying to defend themselves, UN personal have often claimed that the Gypsies got their

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<sup>16</sup> (Gesellschaft für bedrohte Völker (GfbV) / Society for Threatened Peoples (STP) is an international human rights organisation which campaigns with and on behalf of threatened and persecuted ethnic and religious minorities, nationalities and indigenous peoples. Its ideologically and party-politically impartial human rights work on behalf of the Tibetans, Moluccans, Adivasi, Kurds, Yezidi, Assyrian-Chaldaeans, Christians, Baha'i, Southern and Western Sudanese, Sahraouis, Acehans, Yanomami, Navajo, Aborigines, Chechens, Itelmen, Bosnians, Sorbs, Sinti and Roma and many other ethnic groups on every continent experiencing the threat of persecution has been formally recognised by the United Nations. GfbV/STP also has participatory status with the Council of Europe). [http://www.gfbv.de/gfbv\\_deutschland.php](http://www.gfbv.de/gfbv_deutschland.php)

lead poisoning from smelting car batteries. However, Dr. Runow pointed out that none of these other toxic metals are found in car batteries.

Dr. Rohko Kim, a Harvard trained medical doctor employed by WHO in Bonn, Germany, has been advising the UN on the lead poisoning in their camps in Kosovo. Although he is under orders not to give interviews or information about the Gypsy camps, I got him to speak to me. I asked him if the lead poisoning was due to the Gypsies smelting car batteries. He said no. He said most of the lead poisoning came from the toxic dust of the slagheap and from the fact that the camps were built on the tailing stands of the mines. He said that every child conceived in the camps would have irreversible brain damage. He said that we had already lost an entire generation of Gypsy children to lead poisoning. In a speech delivered in 2005 to WHO, UNMIK and the Kosovo

Ministry of Health, Dr. Kim said: "The present situation in the Roma community who are now living in the camps is extremely serious. I have personally researched lead poisoning since 1991, but I have never seen in the literature a population with such a high level of lead in their blood. I believe that the lead poisoning in north Mitrovicë/Mitrovica is unique, which has never been known before in history. This is one of the biggest catastrophes connected with lead in the world and in history."

To date 80 Gypsies have died in the UN camps. Even more miscarriages have occurred. The UN has never investigated one death in the camps or ever made an autopsy. However, from the symptoms described by relatives and neighbours, doctors consulted believe that lead poisoning contributed to most of the deaths and miscarriages.

A few months ago another Gypsy baby died in Osterode camp. It was one month old and had been born with a large head, swollen belly and miniature legs. It woke at six in the morning, vomiting, and died twenty minutes later in hospital.

Lead poisoning is a hideous and painful death for children. Four-year-old Jenita Mehmeti was attending the camp kindergarten when her teacher noticed she was losing her memory and finding it hard to walk. Jenita was sent back to her barracks where for the next three months she vomited several times a day, before becoming paralyzed and dying. When her two year old sister came down with the same symptoms, the UN doctor for Mitrovicë/Mitrovica refused to treat her saying she was in a UN camp one kilometer out of his jurisdiction. An NGO took her to Belgrade and saved her life.

In 1999, the US office in Prishtinë/Priština airlifted 7,000 Albs to Fort Dix, NJ, to protect them from Serbs. In March 2004, the UN police and KFOR evacuated 4,000 Serbs to KFOR bases to save them from Albs. There are precedents in Kosovo for saving lives, but not 500 Gypsy lives.

Thus, this is an appeal to you. In Europe today we have death camps for children. Please do something about it.

[Return to Top](#)

[Return to Contents](#)



## THE TOXIC EFFECTS OF LEAD POISONING

Today, more is known about the effects of lead and the pathways of exposure. Currently, lead is listed as a known or suspected carcinogen in the Environmental Protection Agency's Toxic Release Inventory (TRI). If ingested, lead can accumulate in body organs, including the brain, and result in various degrees of lead poisoning. At high levels of exposure, lead cannot only severely damage the brain and kidneys of adults and children but can cause death (National Safety Council, 2000).

**Lead poisoning affects children under the age of six the most because they still have developing brains and nervous systems and toxic substances can negatively affect their development.** The blood brain barrier has not fully formed by the age of six, which increases the chances of severe damage due to lead exposure. A child's body can absorb up to 50% of the lead ingested. Adults do not absorb lead like children do, however their bodies can absorb between 10-15% of ingested lead.

While adults do not absorb or are as affected by lead exposure, as children are, pregnant women who are exposed to lead risk passing it on to the foetus. Lead exposure can be harmful to young children and babies before being born because lead is able to cross the placenta, causing the amount of lead ingested by the child to be up to 50% attributed to the foetal absorption. Any exposure to lead during the prenatal period hurts the development of the child after being born, making it especially important for pregnant women to avoid lead ingestion and exposure.

Heavy metals, including lead, are present in soils either as natural components or as the result of human activity. Metal-rich mine tailings, metal smelting, electroplating, gas exhausts, energy and fuel production, downwash from power lines, intensive agriculture, and sludge dumping are the human activities that introduce the largest quantities of lead into soils.

Children on average ingest less lead than adults do, but on a dose-per-body-weight basis, children may have two to three times the exposure. Children absorb fifty percent of ingested lead, a rate five times greater than adults (NSC, 2000).

## **SYMPTOMS OF LEAD POISONING IN FOETUSES & CHILDREN**

### **Foetuses**

- premature births
- smaller birth weight
- decreased mental ability in the infant
- abortion

### **Children**

- impairs development
- results in a lower IQ
- shortened attention span
- causes hyperactivity
- causes progressive mental deterioration (includes a loss of motor skills, severe aggressive behaviour disorders, and poorly controlled convulsive disorder)
- causes anaemia, weakness, lassitude, insomnia, facial pallor, weight loss, anorexia, malnutrition, constipation, nausea, abdominal pain, and vomiting

### **Additional References to other toxic metals present in the bodies of children at Osterode and Česmin Lug/Çesmin Llug:**

- Lead Toxicology  
<http://corrosion-doctors.org/Elements-Toxic/Lead-toxicology.htm>
- Cassarett & Doulls Toxicology – The Toxic Effects of Metals  
<http://books.google.co.uk/books?hl=en&lr=&id=G16riRjvmykC&oi=fnd&pg=PA811&dq=%22Goyer%22+%22Toxic+effects+of+metals%22+&ots=gsAovqIheL&sig=34yCCgd8EJICIymIJyQiEvvWdYQ>

## THE TEST RESULTS – BLOOD, HAIR & SOIL TESTS FROM 2005 TO THE PRESENT WITH INTERPRETATION OF HAIR TESTS

These Blood Tests provided in anonymised form are available for download via the links below.

**Most important** are the latest results from 2008 that in spite of WHO claims that lead levels are decreasing, show many individuals from both Česmin Lug/Česmin Llug AND Osterode camp (the so-called “lead-safer” camp), still have life-threatening levels of lead.

**Note also**, that the Hair Tests from 2005 indicated that other elements, not present in car batteries, are found at dangerously high levels. A Guide for interpretation of the hair tests is provided.

Equipment used in the blood testing was an [ESI Lead Care II](#) donated to the Mitrović/Mitrovica Institute of Health by the World Health Organisation.

### BLOOD TESTS - SUMMARY

[Lead Poisoning Test Summary 06 02 2009.pdf](#)

### BLOOD TESTS – 2008

[Test 11 Blood lead Cesmin Lug Apr 2008.pdf](#)

[Test 12 Blood lead Osterode Apr 2008.pdf](#)

[Test 13 Blood Lead Osterode Dec 2008.pdf](#)

### BLOOD TESTS - 2007

[Test 10 Blood Lead 2007.pdf](#)

### BLOOD TESTS - 2006

[Tests 7,8,9 Blood Lead 2006.pdf](#)

### BLOOD TESTS - 2005

[Test 5 Blood Lead 2 2005.pdf](#)

[Test 6 Blood Lead 1 2005.pdf](#)

### HAIR TESTS – 2005

[Test 4 Hair Lead 2005.pdf](#)

### SOIL TEST – 2005

[Soil Test UNMIK 2005](#)

### HAIR TESTS – GUIDE TO INTERPRETATION

[Hair Tests explained.pdf](#)

### BLOOD TESTS – 2004

[Tests 1,2,3 Blood Lead 2004.pdf](#)

## THE OPINIONS OF MEDICAL AND TOXICOLOGY EXPERTS

From Germany, Sweden and the UK expressing the need for immediate evacuation.

**From Erik Solbu**, an Expert in Mining and Metal Industry Pollution formerly at the Department of Environment in Kosovo. He has taken part of information about the environmental and health situation in Roma camps in North Mitrovica

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2009-03-18

1

### Lead contamination of Roma camps in North Mitrovica

#### Letter to all concerned

##### 1. Presentation

The signatory of this letter is an independent consultant with background from metallurgical and heavy chemical industry and with comprehensive experience from international consulting relating to industry, energy and environment. From 2001-2002 he was engaged as Expert in Mining and Metal Industry Pollution at the Department of Environment in Kosovo. He has taken part of information about the environmental and health situation in Roma camps in North Mitrovica and would like to make the following statements:

##### 2. Analyses of lead in soil

Lead in soil analyses have been presented and show that the whole area around the Trepca lead smelter is contaminated. Lead values are found to be in the order of magnitude 0.5 – 1 %. Specific sampling in 2 Roma camps, Zitkovac and Cesmin Lug, show even higher values.

The lead contents at Zitkovac vary between 284 and 45260 mg lead per kg soil, the higher value equal to 4.5 % lead. At this site probably the lead originates from the general contamination with addition of tailings (= deposited rests from ore concentration).

At Cesmin Lug the lead contents vary between 542 and 161800 mg lead per kg soil, the higher value equal to 16 % lead. Such high values cannot be the result of general contamination or tailings, only from dumping of waste materials with high lead content. In this case informal smelting of lead batteries is suspected as main source of contamination. Battery smelting waste deposits are not indicative that the activity is still going on or even recent, but I believe that it has occurred and that the waste will continue to have potentially disastrous effects for as long as people are permitted to come into contact with it.

Lead batteries consist of a plastic casing and inside this lead (Pb), lead oxide (PbO<sub>2</sub>), lead sulphate (PbSO<sub>4</sub>) and sulphuric acid (H<sub>2</sub>SO<sub>4</sub>). Informal smelting sites will afterwards be contaminated by lead oxide, lead

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sulphate and sulphuric acid. Not only is the concentration high, but the lead compounds found are also much more dangerous than lead tied up in e.g. tailings or slag. Used Lead Acid Battery Recycling is rated among the Top 10 Worst Pollution Problems 2008<sup>1</sup>.

### 3. Results from lead in blood analyses of children

The results studied are from tests made at Osterode, but it is reported that figures from Cesmin Lug are equally high. The children tested were born between 1990 and 2006 and the reported lead in blood values vary between 8 and 64 µg/dl. Thirteen values are even so high they are above the detection limit of the analysis. The values are in the same order of magnitude as for professional exposure and then it must be reminded that children are much more vulnerable than grownups. The section below is from the WHO report from Senegal:

Lead is a cumulative toxin that affects multiple body systems, including the neurological, haematological, gastrointestinal, cardiovascular and renal systems. Children are more vulnerable to the harmful effects of lead than adults. The adverse health effects range from death to impaired cognitive and behavioural development that can have lifelong consequences. In children, blood lead levels < 100 µg/L are already associated with cognitive impairment, levels above 450 µg/L require chelation therapy, levels over 700 µg/L constitute a medical emergency requiring immediate treatment, and levels above 1200 µg/L are considered acutely life-threatening.

Because of the difference in reporting (µg/dl respectively µg/l), the values from Osterode have to be multiplied with 10 to be compared with the WHO figures. This shows the seriousness of the situation. All children are at risk, and several are in a situation requiring immediate treatment. There is even reported an excessive mortality in the camps assigned to lead, however the signatory has no further information about this.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.worstpolluted.org/projects\\_reports/display/65](http://www.worstpolluted.org/projects_reports/display/65) and there are several examples worldwide of disasters with lead poisoning at sites where this is going on.

[http://www.who.int/environmental\\_health\\_emergencies/events/Senegal2008/en/index.html](http://www.who.int/environmental_health_emergencies/events/Senegal2008/en/index.html) presents a WHO report from such a site, Thiaroye Sur Mer, Dakar, Senegal



#### **4. Conclusion**

The soil analyses and the lead in blood analyses of children each alone are more than sufficient to characterize the camps as sites unfit for people. Together they constitute strong evidence that the camps should be immediately abandoned, fenced and then cleaned up. The practical problems of finding new places for the camp dwellers to live must not delay evacuation when lives of children and grownups alike are at stake.



Erik Solbu

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**Relocation of IDPs to Camp Osterode**  
UNMIK Press Release, Jan. 5th, 2006

13.1.2006

Dear Mr. Polansky,

thank you for sending me the above UNMIK Press Release from Jan. 5th which details the proposed relocation of the IDPs to the vacated French KFOR Camp.

Although the UN Plan offers access to health and hygiene infrastructure, social supports, children's programmes as well as employment and training opportunities for the IDPs, I have serious reservations about how this relocation will reduce the life-threatening lead and heavy metal pollution. As we know there exist next to the Roma camps and also the French KFOR Camp Osterode huge mountains of toxic soil which continue through contaminated air the heavy metal exposure of all people living there.

Our analysis showed dangerously high levels of different heavy metals (Lead, Arsenic, Cadmium, Aluminum etc.) in 64 IDPs (mainly children). From my point of view it would be absolutely necessary as a preventive step of medical care to relocate the IDPs to a safer unpolluted region. Camp Osterode is not a safe area. In fact, I am not surprised about your report that French military doctors have advised all soldiers who were stationed there not to father a child for nine months after leaving Osterode. I strongly believe that the UN should give the same warning to the IDPs as long as they are in the camps or at Osterode.

Regarding therapy I would like to know which kind of detoxification treatment is planned? I would appreciate any information about this, because I believe the Lead levels and other toxic metals are so high among many of the IDP children that normal treatment (f.e. with EDTA) will mobilize toxic elements too quickly and cause severe symptoms. If there is any help needed from our side please let me know.

Yours sincerely,

  
Klaus-Dietrich Runow MD  
Medical Director, IFU

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## From Prof. Dr. Alastair Hay, Professor of Environmental Toxicology

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**UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS**

**11 February 2009**

### **To whom it may concern**

I have been asked to comment on the blood lead results recorded for the children living in camps for displaced people in Kosovo.

### ***My qualifications***

I am Professor of Environmental Toxicology at the University of Leeds and a member of the Unit of Molecular Epidemiology in the School of Medicine at the University. I have been at the University since 1977.

I hold a Bachelor of Science degree in Chemistry (1969) and a Doctor of Philosophy degree in Biochemistry (1973).

Most of my research is on the effects of chemicals on health and I have published many papers and articles in both the scientific and medical press over the years.

I am member of a number of UK Government committees which make recommendations on matters pertaining to the regulation of chemicals. In 1989 I became a member of the Working Group on the Assessment of Toxic Chemicals (WATCH) in the Health and Safety Executive. Since 1994 I have also been a member of the Advisory Committee on Toxic Substances in the Health and Safety Executive. The Committees in the Health and Safety Executive, of which I am a member, review evidence on the hazards of chemicals and the risk of exposure to these in the workplace, and recommend exposure limits for air concentrations of chemicals.

For the last 3 years I have been a member of a committee which sets occupational health exposure standards in the European Union; the committee is the Scientific Committee for Occupational Exposure Limits (SCOEL).

### ***The lead results in the children***

I have reviewed the blood test results for the children, results which were first available in 2004. The results indicated blood leads for most children at values greater than 65 micrograms per decilitre ( 65 ug/dl ). The values were so high that the instrument could only provide a value at the upper limit for which it was programmed to give reliable results. So the actual blood lead results would have been higher than 65 ug/dl. We have no idea how high they might have been.

Results for successive years since then have indicated a range of values with many children as late as 2008 having blood leads greater than 65 ug/dl. For 2007 and 2008 most children had blood leads over 30 ug/dl with many having values over 40 ug/dl .

Dr L. J Hardie  
Head of Unit

In many countries a blood lead result of 40 ug/dl in a person under 18 years of age would require an employer to investigate the reason for the employee having such a high value. Any values above 50 ug/dl would result in immediate suspension of that person from their job. In other words the person would be reassigned to other duties and removed from the source of the lead.

For male workers over 18 years of age it is currently a value of 50 ug/dl that would prompt an investigation in the UK, and a value of 60 ug/dl, or above, would result in immediate suspension.

Lower limits apply to women of reproductive age because of the risk to the developing foetus and for women in this category there would be immediate suspension if the blood lead was 30 ug/dl, or greater.

### ***Why lead is a concern?***

Lead affects the nervous system and the brain in particular. With blood leads in the region of 80 ug/dl there is a serious risk of lead encephalopathy, or brain damage. At values below this there are very well described effects on health including serious weight loss, effects on the gastrointestinal system, effects on the central nervous system which may manifest as irritability, being unco-operative, persistent headaches, loss of balance, tremors and even hallucinations. Effects on musculature include feelings of general weakness and being easily fatigued. There can also be effects on the organs in the bone marrow which produce blood cells and anaemia can be one outcome.

A major concern is the effect lead has on the developing brain and there have been many well conducted international studies which show that there is a clear relationship between lead and measures of intellectual attainment; the higher the blood lead the lower the intellectual attainment. This means that through no fault of its own a child may not achieve its true potential because its brain has been damaged by lead.

The United States Centre for Disease Control recommends that where a child has a blood lead greater than 45 ug/dl that chelation therapy ought to be undertaken. This therapy involves administration of an agent which complexes the lead in the blood, rendering it unavailable for uptake by tissues, and the chelated lead is subsequently excreted in the urine. This process of chelation may have to be extended to ensure that the blood lead eventually stays below 45 ug/dl.

Blood leads may rise after chelation even though an individual is no longer exposed to lead. This is because most lead in the body resides in bone. When lead is stripped out of the blood by chelation it will be replaced by bone lead and this process will continue as long as there is substantial lead in bone.

### ***What should be done?***

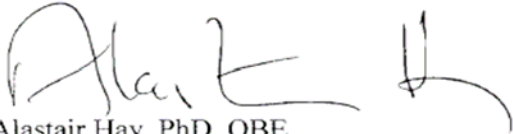
There is no doubt in my mind but that the children have to be removed from the source of their exposure to lead and that this should be with immediate effect.

Most lead in our bodies is through ingestion and this is particularly true for children. They will be exposed to lead in dust and paint and if this is on their hands, contact with the mouth will result in the lead being swallowed and absorbed from the gut.

So, if exposure cannot be prevented by alterations in the environment, the children have to be removed from that environment. If this does not happen their blood lead will remain high, and their health and development will be increasingly impaired.

It is unacceptable that children should have blood leads as high as these children have. Given that many children have values that would result in immediate suspension of an adult worker from his job, it is all the more worrying that children have to live in an environment which is so detrimental to their health.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alastair Hay', followed by a small flourish.

Alastair Hay, PhD, OBE  
Professor of Environmental Toxicology.

[Return to Top](#)

[Return to Contents](#)

## COMPLETE LIST OF DEATHS

that have occurred among those from the camps, from 1999 to the present. The results below are confirmed through door-to-door research, and by the camp leaders themselves. In spite of the known toxic conditions, the families, affected by the most serious detrimental conditions of toxic metal poisoning, were never offered an autopsy, nor has one ever been carried out. Neither has any official record of deaths been made by the authorities.

### Camp Deaths (name anonymised)

No.	Name	Year of Death	Age
1	Saban C	1999	31
2	Jahirovic D	1999	66
3	Hadjera H	1999	
4	Muharem S	1999	
5	Asanaj S	2000	
6	Nerdjivana S	2000	
7	Sadri N	2000	
8	Nadjije U	2000	56
9	Resmije T	2000	6m
10	Nazmi D	2000	
11	Rukije Ba	2000	41
12	Sadri M	2000	33
13	Djiljidan P	2001	
14	Baskim C	2001	42
15	Packoli Z	2001	47
16	Hetem S	2001	8
17	Muhamet B	2001/2	54
18	Neziri N	2002	78
19	Aljija A	2002	5
20	Ali K	2002	52
21	Nadjije R	2002	
22	S	2002	
23	Jahja S	2001 or 3	51
24	Djylinaz R	2003	58
25	Dula T	2003	65
26	Sadije N	2003	54
27	Shakoli F	2003	38
28	Djevrije K	2003	52
29	Behram K	2003	48
30	Ali H	2003	41
31	Nami M	2003	65
32	Resat B	2003	46
33	Mihone C	2003	76
34	Mihone C	2004	63?
35	Djevrije K	2004	52
36	Djenita M	2004	4
37	Chamilje R	2004	
38	Dervisi D	2004	28
39	Rukije M	2005	42
40	Her son at birth	2005	1 day
41	Alili M	2004	68
42	Hetem I	2004	68

43	Bilall H	2004	2 m
44	Sejdiv R	2004	73
45	Alili S	2005	72
46	Denis B	2005	6
47	Behdjet K	2005	43
48	Jahirovic J	2005	24
49	Vehbi S	2005	27
50	Alili M	2005	69
51	Minavera J	2005	31
52	Nadije M	2005	72
53	Muhamed B	2005	65
54	Jahja S	2005	48
55	Jusuti M	2005	52
56	Sejdiu R	2005	72
57	Maroli M	2005	52
58	Hizajet B	2005	53
59	Rukije U	2006	48
60	Demajl K	2005	65
61	Gushani S	2006	45
62	Osmani K	2006	53
63	Dejmalj K	2005	65
64	Alili S	2006	72
65	Hazize M	2006	64
66	Ali H	2006	42
67	Bahtije T	2006	47
68	Alush J	2006	56
69	Meradije N	2007	76
70	Isuf M	2007	62
71	Isuf L	2007	59
72	Hasanaj A	2007	67
73	Nadjije C	2007	70
74	Mujo K	2007	44
75	Sadije S	2008	74
76	Isuf K	2008	1 m
77	Hajrizi V		0
78	Kajtzai S		0
79	Remzije L	25/1/2009	52
80	Enver R	06/2/2009	33
81	Fatima J	22/3/2009	65

[Return to Top](#)

[Return to Contents](#)

## LEGAL TIMELINE & HISTORY OF COMPLAINTS

prepared by Dianne Post, a Human Rights attorney, who has been attempting to use the power of the law to achieve resolution of the problem and compensation for the families. It details the key events.

### TIME LINE – LEGAL ACTIONS

**Updated: February 2009**

DATES	ACTIVITIES
27 June 2005	Letter to UN Secretary General Kofi Annan about waiving immunity.
26 July 2005	26 July - another letter is sent to Kofi Annan requesting immunity waiver.
2 Sept 2005	A criminal complaint is filed locally in Prishtina against persons unknown for violation of Article 291 of the Kosovo provisional criminal code. <a href="http://www.errc.org/cikk.php?cikk=2382">http://www.errc.org/cikk.php?cikk=2382</a>
19 September 2005	ERRC and other organizations submitted report to OSCE
13 February 2006	Filed first complaint with UN third party for 122 clients. Under Article VIII of the Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations, General Assembly Resolution A/RES/52/247, and UNMIK/REG/2000/47(7). No response has ever been received to this complaint. Only that we would get to it in "due course".
20 February 2006	<b>Complaint filed with ECTHR along with Article 39 motion for emergency measures.</b>
3 March 2006	ERRC files second case at UN for 21 more clients from Leposaviq/Leposavić and KRRF, Pursuant to ST/SGB/1997/5 and ST/SGB/2002/7 Organization of the Secretariat of the United Nations Again, never received any response. And filed under ST/SGB/273/1994 Establishment of the Office of the Internal Oversight Services For Roma and KRRF.
6 July 2008	Filed 78-page complaint to Kosovo Ombudsman's Office for Investigation, received thanks, but no action ever taken.
4 July 2008	Filed complaint with Human Rights Advisory Committee office.

## History of complaints to UN Bodies

Compiled by:

**Dianne Post**

**Attorney for Roma IDPs**

CERD	Early warning/early action – filed on 20 September 2005 by ERRC (European Roma Rights Center)
Special Rapporteurs – Housing, Health, Toxic Waste and IDPs	Filed in November 2005 by ERRC and October 2007 by Post
UN High Commissioner for Human Rights	Filed on 18 November 2005, by ERRC and October 2007, February 2008 by Post
HRC Submission to the UN Human Rights Committee, 16 December 2005	Submitted by ERRC
Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights	Urgent action request by KRRF (Kosovo Roma Refugee Foundation) in 6 August 2006
E/CN.4/2006/48/add.1	Response to complaints to special rapporteurs. See paragraphs 78-80.
CEDAW	Filed 15 September 2008 by Post.

[Return to Top](#)

[Return to Contents](#)



## **SOURCES OF CONFUSION AND MISLEADING INFORMATION**

KMEG are very concerned about a number of misleading statements by the International Community that serve **to minimise the urgency of the medical crisis in the camps**. Below are various instances.

### **1. "IDP families were offered alternatives, but refused"**

"In November 2004, UNMIK in Mitrovicë/Mitrovica started the first rumours that the IDPs in the camps were offered an alternative place to move to but had refused. One of these concerned the old smelter site in South Mitrovicë/Mitrovica. In fact, the Roma themselves were never offered this site. That was a suggestion by UNMIK at our meetings in Nov 2004. I opposed that suggestion and it was never mentioned again. But later UNMIK/UNHCR said the Roma were offered relocation but turned it down. The Roma were never offered anything and when UNMIK/UNHCR were asked what site the Roma were offered, no one could name or identify a place. Since then, UNMIK has promoted this fiction that the Roma were offered a resettlement plan but refused" – Paul Polansky (2009)

***The IDPs living in Çesmin Llug/Česmin Lug and Osterode camp have never been offered a comprehensive medical solution to save their children, nor a suitable site for resettlement where they would not be threatened by violence or face continuing heavy metals poisoning.***

KMEG recently spoke to two of the camp leaders who both stated they had never been offered relocation/resettlement to anywhere except the South Mitrovicë/Mitrovica quarter (mahalla) and that was only after 2006, which they turned down, and continue to turn down as the conditions are still not suitable for return there.

### **2. "The South Mitrovicë/Mitrovica quarter (mahalla) will provide a suitable relocation site".**

The option to shift all the families to their old settlement in South Mitrovicë/Mitrovica has proven untenable due to the lack of critical health care infrastructure, and on-going socio-economic insecurity in the south that Romani, Ashkali and Egyptian IDPs face. KMEG has confirmed this situation in recent discussions with medical specialists including employees of the international agencies concerned (in Feb. 2009) who are familiar with healthcare access on the ground in South Mitrovicë/Mitrovica for IDPs. Moreover, these vulnerable IDP families do not have the financial means or resources to move to safer housing elsewhere in the Balkans (Kosovo/Serbia, etc.) or seek a better life in the West on their own, as they are one of the most impoverished communities in Kosovo. Those Romani IDPs that did manage to gain enough resources to go abroad and seek asylum are threatened with the likely possibility of forcible

deportation as they are not perceived to be 'genuine war refugees' by many Western European governments (eg. Switzerland and Germany).

### **3. "Failure to move families to lead safe environments was due to lack of engagement"**

The executive summary of the 2008 Mercy Corps project – which is sponsored by USAID (the United States' government's international aid agency) - claims the international community's efforts to rectify the families' situation have not achieved lasting change primarily due to a failure to fully engage the IDP communities in solutions or to address the myriad associated concerns in an orchestrated manner. This same line is repeated in the recent Helsinki Commission report (Jan 2009) which correctly states that this stems from a "warranted lack of trust" (on the part of the IDPs living in the camps).

While it is correct that neglect, bureaucratic inertia, and an unwillingness (particularly on the part of UNHCR and UNMIK) to engage with Romani IDPs themselves to reach solutions **taking into full account the medical needs of the displaced community**, the key reason for failure was due to a decision to ignore the initial 45-day assurances made by Bernard Kouchner in 1999, ignore the subsequent WHO or ICRC recommendations regarding an emergency evacuation - in 2000, 2004, 2006, and most recently in 2009 - and to conceal the results of the tests (see attached) from the public, thereby ensuring that the health of these families was not seen as a critical priority. KMEG, on the other hand, have involved IDP leaders, who have provided KMEG with a public statement setting out their wishes. (See Dossier - [Item 3](#)).

### **4. "They poison themselves through the smelting of car batteries"**

This is mentioned in the latest UN report by the Secretary General as well as the January 2009 OSCE/Helsinki Commission's report on Kosovo. Both reports fail to mention that these activities are linked to a permit provided by UN officials for this purpose, or that the withdrawal of UN food aid has increased the difficulties of survival in the camps. By suggesting that unofficial battery smelting contributes to the high lead levels, the report implies blame and therefore reduces the impetus to close the camps. Allegations by local WHO staff that the activity is continuing are unproven. Not only is this denied by camp leaders and residents, but local WHO staff, who appear to unofficially condone the activity as a means of supplementing very low or non-existent incomes, have themselves failed to provide any evidence, in spite of repeated requests to do so by KMEG. It is only the existence of a UN permit that prevents this being considered as a criminal activity. In the opinion of KMEG, such activities should never have been licensed or tolerated because of the very serious threat to health that they present. Furthermore, neither report refers to the toxic effects of the many other heavy metals, not found in car batteries, as was demonstrated by the 2005 hair test results, and appear to have been ignored.

### **5. "The Lead levels are Decreasing"**

The 2009 WHO press release claims that lead levels in Osterode camp and Çesmin Llug/Çesmin Lug are decreasing (except for a few individuals). It is unclear as to whether this claim is based on an analysis of the community as a

whole including the returnees to the South mahalla, where environmental contamination levels are lower. KMEG has called for the analysis and the test results from WHO (suitably anonymised), to be made open to public scrutiny, and we hope that WHO will comply.

**6. “Osterode Camp is lead safer” (from CDC report, and repeated again in WHO press release, 2009).**

**This is splitting hairs – Osterode Camp is still dangerously high in terms of lead poisoning.** There are new refugee families who have returned from Serbia and Montenegro (and even Germany) in the past year and are now living in Çesmin Llug/Çesmin Lug, Osterode Camp and the South quarter (mahalla). Some of these families have been tested and have been assessed along with results of those who have lived in the camps for ten years. The results of the new arrivals may have reduced the "average" blood lead level figures. However, what is not shown is that even so these relatively new arrivals too have lead levels high enough to cause organ and brain damage.

The figures that KMEG is in possession of for Osterode Camp are clear, and represent a fairly accurate sample of those living in the camps from 2004 to the present day; they suggest that levels are still too high for human habitation, particularly vulnerable children and pregnant mothers.

**7. “There are simply not enough resources available to help these lead-poisoned families”**

Kosovan Ministers from both the Albanian and Serbian side, as well as implementing NGOs on the ground such as Mercy Corps, claim that adequate funds are not available for assisting these IDP families. However, at the same time, the international community has donated millions of euros to Kosovo and the Kosovan government, including €5.7 million on a Saatchi & Saatchi public relations campaign to heighten its image abroad - WHY therefore, cannot action be taken to save the lives of IDP families, particularly as the Kosovo government has massive US and EU funding provided to it?

Download Saatchi & Saatchi news article [HERE](#)

KMEG would like to know from where the Kosovan government got the money for this public relations campaign? Was it from the US government who are funding the USAID resettlement plan, selecting just 50 of the families for re-housing while leaving 91 on these toxic sites, or was it from the EU who are supposedly funding Roma integration? In either case, while such image-enhancing activities are being pursued, KMEG will leave no stone unturned in our campaign to save the lives of those children poisoned by the actions of those who could act to save them, but fail to do so.

**8. "Medical evacuation and resettlement to a Western country is unrealistic"**

UN and other agencies manage to find the resources for other displaced communities. The most recent example being the resettlement of Burmese refugees in Ireland, under a United Nations scheme. What is missing is political will to take action for this uniquely vulnerable community who are both displaced and whose children have damaged organs. Download news article [HERE](#)

**9. "Since 2005 a comprehensive package of interventions has been delivered to the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian (RAE) residents of temporary camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs)".**

WHO's press release 2009 states that stakeholders have been working to reduce the risks since 2005, but it fails to mention that there has just been a 74% reduction in camp funding, with the exclusion of Çesmin Llug/Česmin Lug from that funding, the withdrawal of food aid and the cessation of treatment for lead poisoning. Thus, this 'comprehensive aid package' mentioned in WHO's press release has been effectively discontinued.

[Return to Top](#)

[Return to Contents](#)

## RELEVANT QUOTATIONS

from medical experts and other prominent individuals directly involved in attempts to get a resolution.

Thomas Hammarberg (Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe) After a four-day visit in Kosovo he expressed his deep concern about the lead-contaminated Roma camps in northern Mitrovica:

**"This is a humanitarian disaster of the most serious nature.** It is no less than scandalous that no solution has been found to protect the inhabitants, including children, even five years after it was conclusively established that living in this area was hazardous. **I appeal urgently to all those responsible to ensure that the affected families can move without delay to a secure environment and that proper medical care is provided to all those contaminated."** (27<sup>th</sup> Mars 2009)

Professor Dr. Alastair Hay (Prof. of Environmental Toxicology, University of Leeds & member of the Unit of Molecular Epidemiology in the School of Medicine. BsC Chem. and Dr. of Philosophy in Biochemistry)

**"It is unacceptable that children should have blood leads as high as these children have.** Given that many children have values that would result in immediate suspension of an adult worker from his job, it is all the more worrying that children have to live in an environment which is so detrimental to their health. **There is no doubt in my mind but that the children have to be removed from the source of their exposure to lead and that this should be with immediate effect."** (Statement To Whom It May Concern 11<sup>th</sup> Feb 2009.)

Baroness Emma Nicholson MEP (member of EU sub-committee on human rights)

"You will recall that during your time in office on behalf of the UN and the international community, a block of IDPs of Roma families were placed by UNHCR on the tailing stands of a lead mine. **I recall visiting them myself when I also had the honour of meeting with you. You stated then that these families would be removed immediately."** (Letter to Bernard Kouchner, French Foreign Minister on 20th Nov 2008 referring to her visit in 1999)

Klaus Dietrich Runow (Medical Director, Institute for Functional and Environmental Medicine, environmental physician)

"I am not surprised about your report that French military doctors advised troops stationed they should not father children for nine months after leaving Osterode. **I strongly believe that the UN should give the same warning to the IDPs as long as they are in the camps or at Osterode"** (13th Jan 2006)

Ilija Elezović (Former UNMIK staff member, Mitrovicë/Mitrovica)

**"I think the danger is so great that it threatens to destroy one full generation of Roma children. UNHCR made a catastrophic mistake by building these camps. Nobody cared about the danger of this location. This is very tragic for everybody but especially for the Roma inhabitants"** (2005).

Dr Miljana Stojanovic (Doctor of Laboratory Chemistry, who left Institute of Public Health, N. Mitrovicë/Mitrovica following death threats)

**"Some of the children in the UN camps will die. Those that don't will have mental and health problems for the rest of their lives".** (Interview 7th July 2005)

**"Thank you for writing the truth. I hope we'll succeed in this"** (email 2008)

Dr Rohko Kim (World expert on toxic poisoning)

**"People who lived on these toxic wastelands were sacrificed for human studies, that's what the scientists and researchers did in the past. But now the international humanitarian agencies should know better than to build camps on toxic waste."** (An interview about his 2005 special mission to Kosovo)

[\*\*Return to Top\*\*](#)

[\*\*Return to Contents\*\*](#)

## A COLLECTION OF IMPORTANT LETTERS

involving key figures, in positions of authority in respect of the camps.

**From Hilmi Jashari, Acting Ombudsperson of Republik of Kosovo**

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**Republika e Kosovës • Republika Kosova • Republic of Kosovo  
Institucioni i Ombudspersonit • Ombudsperson Institucija • Ombudsperson Institution**

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Pristina, 1 April 2009

### ***Ex Officio* No. 304/2008**

**Concerning the lead contamination affecting the Roma community living in the camps located in the northern part of Mitrovicë/Mitrovica.**

Dear Mr. Thaci,

I would like to inform you that the Ombudsperson Institution opened an *ex officio* investigation on 4 July 2008 following the publication of an article in the newspaper “Kosova Post” on 30 June 2008, and the subsequent meeting with the Head of the German NGO “Society for Threatened People” concerning the issue of lead contamination continuously affecting the Roma community living in the camps located in the northern part of Mitrovicë/Mitrovica since 1999.

Based on the information obtained by the Ombudsperson Institution, it appears that in November 1999, UNHCR moved the Roma population displaced in the North to camps established near the former Trepča mine and toxic wastelands, which were indicated by UNMIK as the only places available to relocate this population. Although this solution should have been temporary, the Roma families were still living in these camps by mid 2006 when UNMIK closed two of the camps following pressure from the international press and the Ombudsperson Institution, and moved 100 families to the Osterode camp which was thought to be safer. Some of these families have been entitled to return to the Roma Mahala in the South of Mitrovicë/Mitrovica in 2007 and 2008, but the majority of them continue to live in camps in the North of Mitrovicë/Mitrovica in very poor hygienic conditions.

As early as 2000, WHO performed a medical survey of Mitrovicë/Mitrovica, the results of which conducted UNMIK to close down the smelter in order to reduce health risks caused by pollution. Already on 2000, the inhabitants of the camps in the North were the most affected by the lead contamination and WHO recommended that the Roma camps be evacuated. During the 9 years of displacement of these Roma families, several medicals tests were performed on the population by WHO and the United States Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, notably between 2004 and



2007. In April 2008 the Republic of Serbia Institute for Public Health and Protection performed another series of tests on 104 children, which showed that the Roma population still suffered from an extremely high level of contamination, some of them having such a high concentration of lead in their blood that the testing instruments were not able to measure it. The analysis also showed that there are traces of other heavy metals in their blood.

This lead contamination has affected not only the life and health of the Roma population living in the camps, but also the mental and physical development of generations of children and adults.

Eventually, the responsibility for the management of Camp Osterode was handed over from UNMIK/Department of Central Administration to the Ministry for Communities and Returns on 1 May 2008.

Considering Article 12 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights which defines the right to health as the “right to everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health” and Article 2 of the European Convention of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, which safeguards the right to life, and having in mind the right to adequate housing, the principle of non-discrimination foreseen by the Law on Anti-Discrimination and the rights enshrined in the Convention of the Child, the Ombudsperson Institution concluded that the above-mentioned elements give rise to a continuous violation by UNMIK of more than one international human rights standards directly applicable in Kosovo. The Ombudsperson Institution however observed that this issue has now become the responsibility of the Kosovo government.

The Ombudsperson Institution further assessed that the current level of lead contamination among the Roma population in the North constitutes an emergency according to the Section 1-j of the Health Law No.2004/4 promulgated by Regulation No.2004/31, since the current situation “poses a risk of death or of serious permanent damage to the health of the citizen”. The Ombudsperson Institution observed that it is the primary interest and obligation of public institutions to ensure the promotion and protection of the health conditions of the population without discrimination.

Therefore, in order to put an end to what was already considered as “one of the most serious lead-related environmental health disasters in the world and history” by a WHO expert in February 2005, notwithstanding the right to return to home of displaced persons and keeping in mind that many members of the Roma population are not able to prove their right of property or ownership, I

Recommend:

- the immediate and sustainable relocation of the Roma population living in the camps in the North, in consultation with the community leaders, in a location where their safety and dignity are guaranteed;
- considering the emergency and the gravity of the situation, the construction of adequate housing regardless whether they are able to prove a right of property or ownership in Mitrovicë/Mitrovica South or in other municipalities in Kosovo;
- the immediate intervention of the Ministry of Health, in cooperation with the Ministry of Communities and Return in order to improve the health condition of the Roma population still living in the camps and/or still affected by the lead contamination.

Pursuant to section 4.6 of UNMIK Regulation No. 2006/06 on the Ombudsperson Institution in Kosovo, I would appreciate if you could inform me about the actions you are planning to undertake concerning this issue as soon as possible, and no later than within 30 days.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Best regards,

Hilmi Jashari,  
Acting Ombudsperson

CC:

Mr. Hashim Thaqi, Prime Minister of the Republic of Kosovo  
Mr. Jakup Krasniqi, President of the Assembly of Kosovo  
Mr. Ismet Beqiri, President of the Committee for Human Rights, Gender Equality, Missing  
Persons and Petitions of the Assembly of Kosovo,  
Mr. Alush Gashi, Minister of Health,  
Mr. Saša Rašić Minister of Communities and Returns,  
Mr. Nenad Rasic, the Minister of Labour and Social Welfare.

From: Baroness Emma Nicholson to Bernard Kouchner, former Special Representative in Kosovo to the Secretary General of the United Nations

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EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT



BARONESS NICHOLSON OF WINTERBOURNE

MEMBER OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

MEMBER, COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS  
MEMBER, SUBCOMMITTEE ON HUMAN RIGHTS  
PRESIDENT, DELEGATION FOR RELATIONS WITH IRAQ  
VICE PRESIDENT, WOMEN'S COMMITTEE OF THE EUROMED ASSEMBLY

EN/PL/20081120Kouchner

Mr Bernard Kouchner  
Foreign Minister  
Republic of France

20 November 2008

*Dear President-in-Office, dear Bernard*  
**Lead Poisoning in IDP Roma families in Kosovo**

You will recall that during your time in office on behalf of the UN and the international community a block of IDPs of Roma families were placed by UNHCR on the tailing stands of a lead mine. I recall visiting them myself in September 1999 when I also had a honour of meeting with you.

You stated then that these families would be moved immediately. I know you will be appalled as I that some families are still there. The inevitable consequences of continuing exposure to environmental lead poisoning will be clear to you as was the case in 1999.

I raised the question with Mr Jouyet this morning and attach my letter to him in the strong belief that you will exercise your authority as President-in-office of Council by moving the families to a transitional safe haven with medical care provided whilst assisting them to plan for a long and healthier future.

With every good wish,

Baroness Nicholson of Winterbourne MEP

Enclosures

From: Bernard Kouchner, French Minister for Foreign & European affairs (former UN Special Representative in Kosovo) to Baroness Emma Nicholson MEP  
Translation and note follows:

MINISTÈRE  
DES  
AFFAIRES ÉTRANGÈRES  
ET  
EUROPÉENNES

—  
Le Ministre  
—

RÉPUBLIQUE FRANÇAISE

PARIS, LE

11DEC.08 015718 CM

Madame la Députée,

Par lettre du 20 novembre 2008, vous avez souhaité attirer mon attention et celle de M. Jean-Pierre JOUYET, Secrétaire d'Etat chargé des Affaires européennes, sur la situation de certaines familles d'origine rom qui vivent toujours dans les camps d'Osterode et de Cesmin Llug au Kosovo, malgré la grave pollution au plomb de ces deux sites.

Je partage pleinement votre préoccupation. Dès 1999, lorsque nous avons visité ensemble ces camps, les dangers que la pollution au plomb présentait pour ceux qui y vivaient étaient manifestes.

Des progrès ont certes été réalisés : les camps les plus insalubres ont été fermés, et leurs habitants relogés. L'Union européenne et plusieurs États ont entrepris des actions pour favoriser leur relogement ailleurs au Kosovo, notamment en finançant la reconstruction de maisons.

Ces progrès sont toutefois insuffisants, puisqu'il reste encore des familles dans les camps d'Osterode et de Cesmin Llug, qui vivent dans des conditions inacceptables. La difficulté tient en partie à la réticence de certaines de ces familles d'accepter les solutions de relogement qui leur ont été proposées. Les Roms du Kosovo, plus que toutes les autres communautés, continuent en effet de subir des discriminations de la part des autres communautés et certaines familles craignant pour leur sécurité refusent de quitter les camps où ils sont protégés par la KFOR.

.../...

Madame Emma NICHOLSON OF WINTERBOURNE  
Députée  
Parlement Européen  
67070 - Strasbourg

L'Union européenne met en œuvre les moyens nécessaires pour aider à trouver une solution. Le bureau de la Commission européenne à Pristina suit d'ores et déjà ce dossier avec attention. Lors de son déplacement au Kosovo fin novembre, M. Pierre MIREL, Directeur responsable des Balkans occidentaux à la Direction générale Élargissement, s'est entretenu avec le Premier ministre kosovar à ce sujet. Lors de la session plénière du dispositif de suivi du processus de stabilisation et d'association pour le Kosovo qui s'est déroulée à Pristina le 2 décembre, M. THAÇI s'est engagé à suivre personnellement cette question et à rechercher d'autres localisations.

J'ai donné instruction à l'ambassadrice de France au Kosovo de suivre avec la plus grande attention la mise en œuvre de ces engagements.

En vous remerciant d'avoir attiré notre attention sur ce problème qui n'a que trop duré, je vous prie d'agréer, Madame la Députée, mes hommages.

*et  
l'expression de mes sentiments et plus  
en détail*

  
Bernard KOUCHNER

**Note:** This reply fails to recognise the need for immediacy, ignores the reference to the 45-day promise, and is misleading over offers of resettlement.

**\*TRANSLATION\***

Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs  
The Minister

Republic of France  
Paris, 11 December 08

Dear Madam,

Your letter of 20 November 2008 drew my attention, and that of Mr Jean-Pierre Jouyet, Secretary of State for European Affairs, to the situation of Roma families who remain in the Osterode and Çesmin Llug/Česmin Lug camps in Kosovo despite the serious lead pollution affecting those sites.

I fully share your concern. In 1999, when we visited the camps together, the danger to the inhabitants from lead pollution was obvious.

Some progress has certainly been made: the most insanitary camps have been closed and their inhabitants rehoused. The EU and several Member States have taken steps to encourage their resettlement elsewhere in Kosovo, notably by financing construction of homes.

This progress is not sufficient, however, since families are still living in unacceptable conditions in the Osterode and Çesmin Llug/Česmin Lug camps. Part of the difficulty lies in their reluctance to accept offers of resettlement. The Kosovan Roma, more so than other communities, continue to suffer discrimination and some families who fear for their safety refuse to leave the camps where they are protected by KFOR.

The EU is putting the necessary measures into place to help find a solution. The Office of the European Commission in Prishtinë/Priština is now following this issue closely. During his visit to Kosovo at the end of November, Mr Pierre Mirel, DG Enlargement's Director for the Western Balkans, discussed the subject with the Prime Minister of Kosovo. At the plenary meeting of the Stabilisation and Association Process Tracking Mechanism in Prishtinë/Priština on 2 December, Mr Thaci promised to attend personally to this matter and to look for new sites.

I have instructed the Ambassador of France in Kosovo to follow the implementation of these commitments with the greatest possible attention.

Thank you for having drawn our attention to a problem that has lasted for too long.

[Handwritten] Yours sincerely<sup>17</sup>,  
Bernard Kouchner

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<sup>17</sup> Literally something like: "I beg you to approve, Madam, my respectful and cordial wishes". Probably less formal wording than a Minister would use to, say, a member of the public.

From: David Miliband, UK Secretary of State, to Tilman Zülch, Society of Threatened Peoples.

**KMEG Note:** Fails to recognise the existence of a medical emergency, and attempts to attach blame to Roma intransigence. The budget to KAAD represents a 74% reduction.

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14 February 2009

Tilman Zülch  
President  
GfbV International  
P.O. Box 2024  
D-37010 Göttingen  
Germany



Foreign &  
Commonwealth  
Office

London SW1A 2AH

*From the Secretary of State*

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'David Miliband'.

Thank you for your letter of 2 February about the Roma camps in northern Kosovo.

I know that the difficult situation facing Roma people in Internally Displaced Persons camps is something which the Kosovo Government takes very seriously. In December 2008 the Office of the Prime Minister published a Strategy for the Integration of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian Communities in the Republic of Kosovo which acknowledged Roma communities living in lead-contaminated camps as a problem to be tackled holistically by addressing health, housing, environmental, employment and educational issues. The Government of Kosovo recognises its obligation to close down the camps, but does not want to exert pressure on inhabitants to move before a reasonable alternative is provided.

As you say, the problem is finding a sustainable solution which is acceptable to the Roma. The Ministry of Communities and Returns (who have political responsibility for helping the Roma community find durable solutions and for ensuring their economic, political and social inclusion) is also looking at the issue, and has indicated it wants to close the camps as soon as possible. On 20 January 2009, the Ministry signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Kosovo Agency for Advocacy and Development (KAAD) for the management of camps Osterode and Cesmin Lug. The MoU states that the Ministry will provide almost €59,000 to KAAD for them to use for infrastructural support, basic medical services and staff management to the camps from January until July 2009. The Ministry has cited its intention to continue monitoring the situation closely alongside KAAD, and there is a possibility that the MoU will be extended. In addition to funding, the Ministry and KAAD are working together to find possible solutions for support for individual families upon permanent relocation.

So far, efforts to improve the situation have had limited success, due in part to Roma leaders' preference to remain in the current camps until the Mahalla is rebuilt rather than moving to another temporary site. Non-Governmental Organisations are working with the Roma community to help them reduce their exposure to lead through simple measures such as children wearing shoes and hand washing before meals.



The conditions in the Roma camps have become very bad. However all indications are that the Roma want to stay in northern Kosovo. Many of the Roma are resistant to being moved or evacuated. Some of this resistance might be overcome with more outreach, but other resistance ties in with bigger political issues. I am sure the Government of Kosovo, would welcome your suggestions on how these challenges could be overcome. There is an extremely high chance that if the Roma were moved to another site in northern Kosovo that the lead poisoning issue would continue. Ground and air contamination is a problem throughout most of Northern Kosovo because of the Trepica mining complex.

The first phase of the Roma Mahalla building project has recently been completed which would enable 450 displaced people to return home. This project is a longer term and sustainable solution, but it is demand driven and it takes time for communities to reintegrate and develop an economic profile in the area. A further 48 families are in the process of being assessed for return to suitable accommodation. We hope that agreement over their relocation can be reached soon. USAID (the American Government's development agency) is also providing funding for a similar project to move approximately 50 families of the remaining Roma out of the two camps and into safer areas. This project will also entail small business loans and livelihood schemes as part of the support package the Roma will receive once they have relocated.

The UK Government supports a large project, implemented by the UN Development Programme, to return minorities, including Roma, to their pre-displacement homes throughout Kosovo. Our Embassy and the office of the Department for International Development in Pristina are tracking the situation carefully and supporting efforts to resolve the issue. Previously, we have helped campaigners for the Roma to set up meetings with the Kosovan Ministry of Communities and Returns to discuss this issue. We would be happy to do so again.

I hope this provides you with the information you need on this difficult issue, and the efforts being made to address it.



**DAVID MILIBAND**

From: Olli Rehn, EU Commissioner for Enlargement to Gay Mitchell MEP

**KMEG Note:** Offers financial support, but fails to recognise the existence of a medical emergency, and appears unaware of families wishes regarding the Mahalla.

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OLLI REHN  
MEMBER OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION

RUE DE LA LOI, 200  
B-1049 BRUSSELS  
TEL. (+32-2) 295.79.57

Brussels, 17.2.2009  
D (2009) 39

Dear Honourable Member of Parliament,

Thank you for your letter addressed to my colleague Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner, dated 14 January 2009.

The Commission fully shares your concern as regards the issue of lead contamination in the Roma camps in Northern Mitrovica and is actively working to contribute to a solution. The current situation is unacceptable and must be brought to an end urgently.

The Commission is determined to do its utmost to help find an adequate and sustainable solution. This would necessarily involve the relocation of the people concerned, the provision of medical treatment and/or support to the development of economic activities. Close cooperation between the authorities, the internally displaced persons themselves, and international agencies is therefore essential.

The Commission and other donors stand ready to provide a significant financial contribution to a durable solution. Funding is not the primary problem, however. The political side of the problem is more complicated. It requires the full commitment from all stakeholders to be resolved, as well as careful preparation and coordination between local and international partners involved. Consultations are ongoing to this effect, with the Commission playing a pro-active facilitating role.

As you will be aware, the Roma camps have been run under the auspices of the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK). However, UNMIK's role has changed following the events that took place in Kosovo in the first half of 2008 and its subsequent reconfiguration. As a result, the camps now fall under the responsibility of the government of Kosovo. However, the government's effective authority in the area where the camps are located is limited.

Mr Gay Mitchell  
Member of the European Parliament  
B-1047 Brussels

The Commission has repeatedly raised the issue with the authorities. Its latest Progress Report on Kosovo issued last November, for example, confirmed that "housing conditions remain critical and endanger life in some areas". In December, the Commission discussed the issue with the government within the framework of the EU's Stabilisation and Association Process, at which occasion the authorities confirmed their intention to engage with the local Roma leaders to find satisfactory solutions.

The Commission has also provided financial assistance. Under the CARDS programme, it helped eleven Roma families from the camp at Cesmin Lug to return to the Roma Mahalla at Mitrovica, their place of origin. The €1.2 million CARDS project was implemented between December 2005 and November 2007 and involved housing reconstruction, the provision of food, legal assistance, basic household appliances, firewood, medical assistance, income generation grants, infrastructure and community development assistance. Beneficiaries also participated in sport and education activities carried out under a related CARDS 2005 project. Further financial assistance under the IPA programme is under discussion.

Meanwhile, the Commission will continue its active, direct involvement in efforts to find a sustainable solution.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'BRE' followed by a long horizontal stroke.

[Return to Top](#)

[Return to Contents](#)

**Letter from Bob Golten, Counsel,  
"Center for International Human Rights Law & Advocacy"**

to Gloria Jean Garland, senior Rule of Law / Human Rights Expert for the Democracy and Governance Office, **USAID**

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Center for International Human Rights  
Law & Advocacy  
(University of Denver)

February 24, 2009

Ms. Gloria Jean Garland, Esq.  
Office of Democracy and Governance  
U.S. Agency for International Development (US AID)  
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue N.W., Room 3.10.20,  
Washington, DC 20523

BY FAX: 202-216-3231

Re: Lead Poisoning of Roma (gypsies) in Kosovo

Dear Jean:

Our Center is now assisting human rights activist Paul Polansky, and the Kosovo Roma Refugee Foundation he heads up as well as the Society for Threatened Peoples with which Mr. Polansky is closely associated.

Paul Polansky has been trying for some years to save the lives of some 150 Roma refugee/IDP families, and especially vulnerable Roma women and children, who have been consigned to two highly lead-toxic tailings sites (Osterode and Cesmin Lug) in North Mitrovica. The lead levels of the Roma residents are in many cases astronomical, in most potentially-lethal.

These families, according to informed sources (including Mr. Polansky, who is *extremely* well informed), need to be **immediately evacuated** for medical evaluation and treatment; and eventually resettled.

As the former legal director of the European Roma Rights Center (in Budapest) you may or may not be familiar with this dreadful situation.

In any event, your present principal US AID has a role in this sad drama.

It has reportedly made a \$2,400,000 contract with Mercy Corps to resettle 50 (roughly 1/3) of the at-risk Roma families and have them resettled out of harm's way. However, Mercy Corps, seems NOT to be taking **immediate** steps in implementing the contract to rescue even the inadequate number of endangered camp residents whom they have yet to select – let alone making serious efforts, in concert with AID, to enlarge either the scope or the funding of the numbers of people protected under the existing contract.

This apparent dereliction – dare I say *negligence*? – on the part of Mercy Corps and, arguably, your agency raises the spectre of possible legal liability for both your Mercy

Corps contractor (i.e., for not acting more aggressively and with more urgency) and for AID (under the Alien Tort Claims Act, for violating "treaties of the U.S.", e.g., Articles 6(1), 7 and 26 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; also, Article 2(1)(a), International Convention of Eliminate All Forms of Racial [including Ethnic] Discrimination.)

I wonder if you would be willing to look into this, and either get back to me by phone/e-mail or tell me a good time and number at which to reach you. There should be a way to satisfactorily resolve this dilemma with some alacrity. If it takes \$2,400,000 to save the lives of 1/3d of these Roma (which US AID may be complicit in retaining in these two dangerous places) than spending \$7 million – even in these days of fiscal austerity – to help save the lives of **150** families seems not only plausible but imperative.

Thanks in advance for giving this your thoughtful attention and appropriate action..

Warm regards,

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Robert J. Golten, Counsel

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[\*\*Return to Top\*\*](#)

[\*\*Return to Contents\*\*](#)



## REFERENCE LIST OF AUDIO-VISUAL INFORMATION AND MEDIA INVOLVEMENT

A number of films, and talks are publicly available which show the situation within the actual camps.

These can be viewed by following the links below.

**"GYPSY BLOOD"** a film made by Paul Polansky in 2005

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HFpUXDKVA9w&feature=Playlist&p=80EED4876CA4CF11&index=0&playnext=1>

**"UN POISON CAMPS"** a presentation made by Paul Polansky during December 2008 to European Leaders at EU, UK & Irish Government level. This version was given before the Irish Foreign Affairs Sub-Committee

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U-WCKRhbiHI&feature=Playlist&p=706434A3AC3B655D&index=0&playnext=1>

**"TRAPPED"** A film made by Katalin Barsoni in 2008

[http://www.mundiromani.com/about\\_us/?film\[film\]\[keyvalue\]=31 - film](http://www.mundiromani.com/about_us/?film[film][keyvalue]=31 - film)

**"BBC HIGHLIGHTS LEAD SCANDAL IN KOSOVO"** by the BBC's European Correspondent Nick Thorpe

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=plrMEMVu6HQ&feature=Playlist&p=A36E19BACEDA38D5&index=0>

**"A PHOTOGRAPHIC RECORD OF LIFE IN AND AROUND THE OSTERODE AND ČESMIN LUG/ÇESMIN LIUG CAMPS"** by Bernard Sullivan (KMEG)

<http://picasaweb.google.co.uk/bernardsullivan2001/UNSToxicRomaCampsInKosovoOsterodeAndCesminLug>

**"UN's TOXIC SHAME"** a film made by Amos Roberts from SBS Television Australia

<http://www.sbs.com.au/dateline/story/watch/id/600035/n/UN-s-Toxic-Shame>

## HISTORY OF IDP CAMPS in KOSOVO FOR ROMA, ASHKALI AND EGYPTIANS

- prepared by KMEG, with information concerning International agencies, NGOs, and implementing partners collaborating in the camps and opening/closing of the camps to date.

UNHCR, 1999-2008	Legal administrators of the camps; funding, monitoring
ACT 1999-2006	Construction and administration of the north Kosovo camps
UNICEF, 1999-present	Child protection, education
CRP/K <sup>18</sup> , 2003-present	Issuing legal Kosovo documents
Danish Refugee Council, 2003-05	Distributions, assessments for north Kosovo camps
CARITAS 2000-2004	Food aid
ICRC, 2005-2007	Milk Distribution, historical background
Kosovo Caritas, 2005-present	Education
NCA, 2006-2008	General Camp Management for north Kosovo camps
AFPK, 2007-present	Education
Mercy Corps, 2009-present	Resettlement program for north Kosovo camps
KAAD, 2009-present	General Camp Management
Kosovo Ministry of Communities and Returns, 2008 - present	Legal administrators of the camps; funding, monitoring

**Kablar/Kablare** - opened as an UNHCR IDP camp in 2001. These barracks were already in existence having housed Serb workers living there before the war but had been abandoned in the mid-1990s when they were found to be asbestos-contaminated. Many Roma returned from Serbia in 2004, and since there was no space for them in Çesmin Llug/Česmin Lug, they occupied the abandoned barracks in Kablar/Kablare. The camp was closed in 2006 when some of the huts mysteriously caught fire. The occupants then moved to Osterode. All families except one from this camp are now in Osterode; one family is in the South Mahalla. From 2005 to 2006 when it caught fire, the camp was administered by Norwegian Church Aid (NCA). Before that, the camp was refurbished and administered by ACT.

**Zhitkovc/Žitkovac** - tents were established there in Sept. 1999 for all the Mitrovicë/Mitrovica Roma who had earlier found refuge in a school house in Zvečan/Zvečan. Later, in 2000, some were sent to Çesmin Llug/Česmin Lug when it was built. The barracks at Zhitkovc/Žitkovac were built in 2002 at the end of March/beginning of April. It was closed in 2006. All the occupants went to Osterode camp. The camp was administered by ACT from 1999 to 2005 and by NCA from 2005 to 2006. ACT built the barracks using mainly second-hand lead-painted boards. UN health officials and WHO recommended this camp be evacuated in Nov 2000 because of some of the highest lead levels in medical history among the camp children. In 2004, ICRC, WHO and many international NGOs demanded the camp be evacuated immediately because lead levels continued to rise, especially among the camp children.

**Osterode Camp** - ready for people in January 2006. In January, all the IDPs from Kablar/Kablare moved to Osterode Camp. Between January and February,

<sup>18</sup> Civil Rights Program/Kosovo, originally begun in 1999 under the auspices of the Norwegian Refugee Council.



half of the people in Çesmin Llug/Česmin Lug moved to Osterode Camp. In March/April, IDPs were arriving every day from Zhitkovc/Žitkovac until all the IDPs had moved camp. Formerly a French NATO base, it was abandoned after French soldiers were found to have high lead levels. As an UNHCR IDP camp it was administered by NCA from March 2006 until Dec 2008. It is presently under the jurisdiction of the new Kosovo government (Ministry for Returns and Communities) and administered by KAAD, a Kosovan Albanian NGO that was established by NCA national staff with headquarters in Prishtina. In 2008, many international NGOs called for the immediate evacuation of the camp because the lead levels of several camp children had doubled since moving into the camp in 2006. In January 2009, WHO called for the evacuation of the camp. Today 111 families still live in the camp.

**Çesmin Llug/Česmin Lug** - opened in Dec. 1999; in January 2000, IDPs came from Zhitkovc/Žitkovac to Çesmin Llug/Česmin Lug. It was built and administered by ACT until 2005 and by NCA until the middle of 2006. It is currently monitored by KAAD but receives no aid or supplies as Osterode does. All of the barracks built by ACT consists almost exclusively of second-hand lead-painted boards. UN health officials and WHO recommended this camp be evacuated in Nov 2000 because of some of the highest lead levels in medical history among the camp children. In 2004, ICRC, WHO and many international NGOs demanded the camp be evacuated immediately because lead levels continued to rise, especially among the camp children. In 2006, 2007, 2008 and January 2009, WHO and many international NGOs demanded that the camp be evacuated and destroyed because of continuing rising lead levels, esp. among the camp children. Today 47 families still live in the camp.

**Plementina/Plementinë** - opened Nov. 1999 to accommodate the RAE IDPs formerly in the Krushevac camp by Obiliq/Obilić. For seven years these families were housed in the grounds of the nearby power plant in heavy-metal contaminated barrack accommodation abandoned in the mid-1990s by Serb workers because of the toxicity present. In 2007 most of the families were moved to two new apartment blocks built on the same toxic wasteland. There are still RAE families living in the contaminated barracks because no durable solution has been found to date for them.

**Krushevac Camp (near Obiliq/Obilić)** - opened July 1999; about 500 RAE fled the camp in Sept. 1999 and went to the Stenkovac camp in Macedonia. Many are still in Macedonia seeking asylum. Despite their being in another country, UNHCR has always refused to consider them as refugees. In Nov. 1999 the remaining RAE were moved by UNHCR to the Plementina camp despite warnings that the barracks there were contaminated and built on toxic wasteland.

**Leposaviq/Leposavić** - opened in June 1999 in an abandoned Yugoslav army warehouse; it remains open to this day. The families at this camp are also contaminated by lead since most of the mothers/brides come from Osterode and Çesmin Llug/Česmin Lug and most of the residents worked in the Trepča mines. Today 37 families still live in the camp.

## CORPORATE INFORMATION

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### Links:

[www.toxicwastekills.com](http://www.toxicwastekills.com)

[www.gfbv.ch](http://www.gfbv.ch)

[www.gfbv.de](http://www.gfbv.de)

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June 2009