

# PRESS RELEASE

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## New report condemns ten years of "official inertia", calls for immediate evacuation of toxic refugee camps in Kosovo

In their new Dossier reporting on the situation of Roma, Ashkali and Kosovo-Egyptians housed in two heavy metal-contaminated refugee camps in North Mitrovica/Mitrovicë, Society for Threatened Peoples International/Gesellschaft für bedrohte Völker International (STPI/GfBV) and the Kosovo Medical Emergency Group (KMEG) describe the failure of international and national agencies to take appropriate action as scandalous. **STPI/GfBV and KMEG are calling for immediate evacuation of the camps and appropriate medical treatment for the refugees.** Following the NATO intervention in Kosovo in March 1999 - exactly 10 years ago - members of the minority groups were driven from their homes by Albanian extremists. Since then they have been housed in toxic waste-contaminated refugee camps. Some 80% of the approximately 150,000 Roma, Ashkali and Kosovan-Egyptians in Kosovo were made homeless and 70 of their villages and urban neighbourhoods destroyed.

"The inertia of international and national agencies in Kosovo poses a threat not just to the health but even to the lives of these vulnerable refugees", STPI/GfBV and KMEG argue in the 67-page report. The camps in North Mitrovica/Mitrovicë that currently house approximately 560 refugees, including more than 200 children under the age of ten, were constructed by the UN in 1999 on waste tailings from the closed Trepča mine. Assurances were given that these temporary camps would be closed within 45 days. Despite warnings from STPI/GfBV, the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the toxic Osterode and Česmin Lug/Çesmin Llug camps with their environment contaminated by heavy metals including lead, arsenic, antimony, cadmium and manganese have still not been evacuated.

In the course of several fact-finding missions organised by STPI/GfBV, environmental medicine specialist Klaus-Dietrich Runow obtained hair and blood samples from refugees living in the camps. **The results were alarming: lead levels in the samples were several times higher than permitted maximum limits. Experts agree that the levels observed cause irreversible damage to the nervous and immune systems and interfere with bone development and blood formation. Children and pregnant women are particularly at risk.** It is not unreasonable to assume that many of the 80 deaths to date and the high incidence of birth defects are closely associated with the severely contaminated environment.

Along with the Dossier, STPI/GfBV and KMEG are sending out an urgent appeal today to all relevant international and national decision-makers. The appeal urges them to use their influence to secure a rapid evacuation of the camps and appropriate medical treatment for the inhabitants.

We will be happy to provide a copy of our latest briefing paper on request (in English). Detailed background information and photos can be found at:

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

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Menschenrechtsorganisation mit beratendem Status beim Wirtschafts- und Sozialrat der Vereinten Nationen und mitwirkendem Status beim Europarat



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