

## **THE PUBLIC STATEMENT BY DECANI ORTHODOX MONASTERY**

For immediate press release, Decani, (Kosovo province) June 12, 1998

After the recent tragic and frightful events on the territory of Decani Municipality and generally in Kosovo province we feel our moral duty to make the public statement. Despite our active efforts and wishes that Kosovo problem is resolved in a peaceful and non violent way, which we have expressed in our previous statements, with great grief in our hearts we must admit that the situation in the western part of Kosovo has escalated into violence which brought new victims, many ruined and burned houses and several thousands of refugees. During the armed clashes in the area our brotherhood remained closed within the monastery where we offered our hospitality to several Serb families from Decani who came to us with their children. It was only after the end of the fighting that we could see the tragic consequences of the armed conflict in our neighborhood. Our brotherhood expresses its deep regret for everything that happened and our sincere sympathy with all innocent victims on both sides who lost their dear ones and had to leave their homes. Especially we feel great grief for the town of Decani in which we have been living for years and which gives us a picture what uncontrolled human madness can do. With great pain in heart we feel the troubles of the refugees, especially of women, children and elderly people, many of whom still are not able to go back to their homes. We feel pity for the damaged and ruined religious objects and old kulla's.

Although we are aware that few are ready to listen to our words, we make an appeal on both Serbs and Albanians, especially their political leaders, to continue as soon as possible the already started dialog and make a firm obligation that they will do all they can to stop further violence. The violence cannot be overcome by violence and any violent act immediately produces more violence. Unfortunately, in this conflict the greatest victims are innocent civilians which suffer immensely because of aggressive political ambitions. Although our Church is deeply attached both spiritually and historically to the Serbian people it nevertheless has the spiritual obligation towards all others who live in this region, especially towards the needful and unprotected people. Hence, if in this tragedy we have to take someone under our protection, we do not have moral right do this either on ethnic or religious base, but we bravely dare express our sympathy first with all innocent victims, the hungry and displaced people no matter which ethnic group they belong to. Therefore we firmly condemn any criminal act, inhuman conduct and injustice no matter by whom or where it was done. No one has moral right to build his happiness on the misfortune of his neighbor.

This is what our Faith is teaching us, our Saints and the holy tradition of the Orthodox Church. This is what we have preached to all who come to our monastery. From the very beginning of the conflict in this area Decani Monastery opened its gates and brotherly helped the refugees from the neighboring villages. And now we are trying to provide enough food supplies to be able to help anyone who asks for our help and assistance. In this we are ready to cooperate with the international humanitarian organizations if necessary.

In order that the tragic consequences of the armed conflict in Kosovo are relieved as soon as possible a lot of efforts and good will is needed. First of all everything should be done that the

extremely difficult humanitarian situation is improved and that enough quantities of food and medicines are provided for all the needy. It is also urgent that any violence should immediately be stopped so that the refugees may freely go back to their homes and repair their damaged houses. Both Serbs and Albanians must understand that in 21st century Europe there is NO place for ethnically cleansed territories, terror and crimes. These regions of the Balkans will never be able to become the equal part of the modern world as long as the conditions for peaceful coexistence of all peoples, no matter what religion or ethnic group they belonged, are created. All those who hope to realize their aggressive nationalist ideas by force and violence against the civilian population definitely belong to the past. And such dark side of the past must be forgotten once for ever in the name of the future of the young generations who have unalienable right to live in true freedom.

Although both Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo have many differences, they nevertheless have something very important in common, and that is their common interest and the right for the peaceful future in the area where they have been living together for centuries. When we all understand that our unrealistic dreams and ambitions should be subordinated to that goal the true peace will finally prevail in this part of Europe.

We pray and sincerely hope that the representatives of our both peoples, oppressed by heavy historic burdens and sufferings, will finally manage to provide lasting peace and full respect of the human rights in Kosovo and Metohija so that once for ever the killings, looting and ethnic persecutions might become the matter of the past. If they fail in this, they will carry a great responsibility in front of the world and history for everything that happens.

Our monastic brotherhood, our Church with our arch-pastor Bishop Artemije remain firm in our efforts to persevere in our peaceful position and opposition to any violence no matter from which side it comes from. We sincerely believe that all people of good will will approve of our efforts.

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