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**Opinion piece in UNMIK Direct newspaper:**

**Kosovars Must Affirm:
"Yes" to Peace and Reconciliation, "No" to the Fires of Vehemence**

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| 001*(Upper, in the left side) KFOR mobilized: To protect Human Rights marchers (Down, in the left side) Bombing of the Yugosllav Representative home: A carefully planned terrorist act. (Down, in the right side) Murdered returnee Ashakalis: A major discouragement for donors*  | Violence is like a plague for it breeds on itself like an endless circle on the wheel of life. Violence nurtures disorder in the minds of men, it scorches the land, inexorably society descends into an abyss. Unless the current deterioration in the security situation is stemmed Kosovars' attempts to build a civil society with the help of the international community will fail. That is why Kosovars should affirm, both within themselves and to each other: "Yes" to peace and reconciliation, "No" to the fires of vehemence. They would be standing on a moral high ground.When NATO forces intervened in mid-1999 and the United Nations arrived the intention was to bring peace, to rebuild Kosovo based on democratic institutions and the rule of law. This called on Kosovars to make a spiritual overhaul: to relinquish the casual attitude to violence so that it was no longer interwoven into the social fabric. Certainly in the year and a half since UNMIK arrived considerable achievements have been made: donor commitments have been large permitting a reconstruction programme to get underway, elections were held and local self-government established - all helping Kosovo get back on its feet. |
| But solutions imposed from the outside can never substitute for national reconciliation. For a permanent peace, a committed dialogue between communities must occur. Only in this way can Kosovars close a decade of political and economic misery.The results of the municipal elections, with the majority voting for the moderate LDK party, demonstrates that Kosovars want an end to the violence, a durable peace. No Kosovar wants to live in a prison, under siege, but in a society that allows everyone, regardless of ethnic background, to live a life free from danger. Tolerance must reign allowing the return of all minorities so a democracy along Western European lines can be built. And the majority should not allow extremists to impose their will through terror and murder. Kosovars must make active commitment to ensure the voices of the peaceful majority are heard above the whistle of bullets. They should remember history's admonishment: "Whoever lives by the sword shall perish by the sword." A civil society means tolerance, bridging the communal divide, allowing refugees of various ethnic groups to return to their homes. KFOR continues to find caches of weapons and explosives demonstrating that the cult of violence has not receded. This is hardly conducive to making other communities feel secure or welcome. Nor will the cult of violence avenge those lying in mass graves. For the victims would not want their loved ones to experience the same cursed fate. Since the municipal elections political violence has been escalating. The killing of Xemajl Mustafa, a spokesman for Rugova, outside his Pristina apartment at the end of November, followed closely upon the heels of the murder of Yugoslavia's chief representative in a bomb attack in what Dr. Kouchner called "a well prepared and very carefully executed" act, underscored a growing trend of premeditated violence. The trend had begun with the murders, two weeks earlier, of four Roma males who had returned to their homes in the Skenderaj region. And reports of attacks on Serb police in the border area between Kosovo and Serbia shows violence threatens to destabilize the entire region. The UN Security Council condemned "the escalation in terrorist acts by Albanian extremists," which "risked provoking a new war in the region." The US Secretary of State, Marilyn Albright, also noted: "Continued violence erodes the moral support Kosovo has traditionally held in the international community."All the above incidents were politically motivated and sent clear messages. The murder of Mustafa was a warning to the LDK not to enter into a dialogue with Serbia. The bomb attack on the Yugoslav envoy was a "no" to any direct Serb interference in Kosovo. The attack on the Askkalis was a directive to the Serbs not to return. The ongoing tension in the Presovo Valley was undertaken to continue the destabilization of Serbia.Instead of attenuating from mid-December the violence now widened, directed at the UN and KFOR. On 19 December at Zubin Potok the UN police station was attacked by automatic gunfire and grenades. Four UN cars were damaged by bullets and the fifth one blown up. An attack on UN and KFOR soldiers also occurred at Leposavic by Serbs leading the SRSG to comment that extremists on both sides wanted to undermine the peace process in Kosovo.At a recent Joint Interim Administrative Structure (JIAS) meeting Dr. Kouchner urged political parties and leaders to take concrete steps to stop the political violence. We exhort every citizen to do the same: not in words, but in civic actions. Kosovars must pull back from the brink before the last chance for peace disappears. For already the international community is turning away, while recent election results in Serbia is again drawing the republic into the approbatory arms of the West. A catharsis is needed in Kosovo today. That will help quell the rise in violence, put a spoke in the wheel of communal revenge. One might say, in the words of Martin Luther King, "I had a dream " - the cycle of an eye for an eye comes to a stop. As a new dawn impinges, a halcyon calm reigns, all communities in Kosovo pause to take stock of the last decade and pledge to make a new beginning. The windows of Kosovars' minds are opened to let in the breeze of a new springtime so the olive branch can take root*Alexandra George is an author, translator and journalist. She is the author of three books, her current work is on the transition in Russia. Ms. George has reported from South and South-East Asia, Central Asia and the Middle East.*[Contact: A George: (038) 504 604 Ext. 5471; E-mail: george@un.org] |