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1999 – BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON KOSOVAR REFUGEES CONTENTS

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(1) KOSOVA:

Until 1989 Kosova was an autonomous unit in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. It is currently the southern province of Serbia, one of the two states that make up the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (the other being Montenegro). It covers an area of 11,000 square kilometres and is bounded to the west by Albania, to the north and east by Serbia and to the south by the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. There is also a short border in the north west with Montenegro.

Prior to the current crisis, the population of Kosova was about 2.2 million, approximately 200,000 of whom were ethnic Serbs, Montenegrins, Roma or members of other ethnic minorities, and about 2 million (93%) were ethnic Albanians. The reason for the high percentage of Albanians came about in part as a result of history (annexation of an area with a high Albanian population) and more recently because of the proportionally higher birthrate among the Albanians and emigration by Serbs.

(2) KOSOVO/KOSOVA:

The terms Kosovo and Kosova are both being used in relation to the current crisis in the Balkans.

Kosovo is the name of the province in the Serbian (Serbo-Croat) language.
Kosova is the name of the province in the Albanian language.

Given the events surrounding the exodus, it would be preferable if those working with the refugees used "Kosova".

Kosova placenames are also spelt differently in Serbian and Albanian. Major centres are as follows:

- Serbo–Croat
- Albanian
- PristinaPec
- Djakovica
- Brestovic
- Ljubenic
- Decani
- Glodjane
- Donji Prekaz
- Srbica
- Malisevo
- Glogovac
- Novi Poklek
- Orahavac
- PrishtinaPeja
- Gjakova
- Berstevic
- Lybeniq
- Decan
- Gllogjan
- Prekaz i Poshtem
- Skenderaj
- Malisheva
- Gllogovc
- Poklek i Ri
- Rahovec

(3) THE KOSOVARS:

The following has been prepared for Australians who will be working with refugees from Kosova, be they people coming as part of an emergency airlift or as entrants under the Refugee and Special Humanitarian Program. It is acknowledged that it contains many generalisations and thus is intended as an introduction only. Workers should endeavour to supplement this with information gained from members of the community and the entrants themselves.

(i) Introduction:

Kosovar society is governed by a clearly defined set of rules which prescribe the way that people relate to each other and in which honour (the individual's, the family's and the community's) is seen as fundamental.

It is important to remember this in all dealings with the Kosovars, in particular in interactions between Australians and Kosovars (see below).

(ii) Languages:

While the official language of the country is Serbo–Croat, for most ethnic Albanian Kosovars, Albanian is their first language and language of choice. It is a totally different language to the languages spoken in the rest of Former Yugoslavia. Where ever possible, Albanian interpreters or bilingual workers should be used. For many of the younger Kosovars, English will be their second language.

The language "Serbo–Croat" that unified Yugoslavia during the Tito era has several distinct forms. Most older Kosovars will understand Serbian but will not feel comfortable if it is used (for some it may trigger hostile emotions or painful memories of traumatic events). They will also understand Bosnian and Croatian interpreters but again, their use should be kept to a minimum and used with an explanation as to why it was necessary to do so.

(iii) Religion:

Islam is the most widely practiced religion in Kosova (approx 70% of the population are Muslims) but there are also significant numbers of Catholics and Orthodox.

Religion is not a key defining factor in Kosovar society, especially in the cities where many people will identify with one of the faiths but rarely go to the mosque/church. The practice of Islam tends to be relaxed and is far removed from the strict adherence seen in some parts of the world

The sense of connection to Kosova is seen as being far more important than an individual's religious background (the real religion is "Kosova").

This being said, the Kosovars have been through a very traumatic experience and thus even the least religious may need access to places of worship.

(iv) Urban–Rural Divide:

Like all countries, there are significant differences in the people from urban and rural areas. Recognising the gross generalisation in this:

- people from urban areas tend to be more sophisticated and educated, often speaking several languages; and
- people from rural areas often come from simple farming backgrounds with a limited world view.

Irrespective of their background, it is probable that the Kosovars will have little knowledge of Australia or Australian life.

(v) Family:

The family is the central unit of Kosovar society and is considered very important. "Family" covers not only the nuclear family but the extended family. In rural areas it is common that extended families will live together in compounds, sharing both the farming and domestic duties. It is therefore essential that families – even those with several subgroups – be kept together at all times.

Kosovar society is both patriarchal and patrilineal, with the structure being somewhat akin to a pyramid – with the elders being afforded the greatest respect. Depending on family structure, the patriarch will either be the grandfather or the eldest son. All decisions concerning the family are made by him. It is important that workers identify the patriarch within the family (and possibly the extended family) and direct their interventions towards him. Failing to do this (eg asking the wife or a younger family member to make a choice on behalf of the family) is likely to cause offence. If the family is headed by a woman, it will be necessary to:

- identify whether she and her children have been subsumed by part of their extended family (eg brother-in-law or uncle); and if this is not the case
- recognise that she may have had little experience making decisions on behalf of her family.

There is also a hierarchy amongst children, with the eldest son being given certain privileges and, in the absence of the father, adopting a protective role in relation to other family members.

It is usual for people to marry young and until marriage the young adult will live with his/her parents. Unmarried women are very closely supervised "to protect their honour".

The size of families differs throughout the province. Typically urban families will have 2–4 children, rural families are likely to have 3–5+. Childrearing is very much the domain of the women, fathers having little involvement in day to day care of children.

(vi) Home:

A family's home is also very important in Kosovar society – not just as a place to live but also as a place to extend hospitality. Kosovars are generous hosts and will be offended if a guest to their home does not accept coffee and food (usually a sweet pastry such as baklava). This is seen as part of social interaction and also as a way of repaying the kindness of others. Reciprocity is a key part of Kosovar culture.

It is important that those working with the Kosovars understand that the offer of refreshments is not only about satiating their thirst/hunger but also about enabling the Kosovars to "do that which is honourable". It is important too that if Kosovars are housed in military facilities, provision be made for them to entertain in their own "space".

(vii) Recreation:

Typically recreation is defined along gender lines and even on those occasions when the whole family attends a function/party, the men and women will socialise separately – often in separate rooms.

Kosovars have a strong "coffee culture" – either going to coffee shops or visiting friends for coffee. As in many Mediterranean countries, the men will gather in coffee shops to talk, smoke, drink coffee and play cards (sometimes chess). Women will also forgather, often in someone's home. It is therefore important that in the military facilities, separate space be made available for the men and women to meet.

There is also a strong tradition of the "evening constitutional". Whole families will go out together at the end of a day's work and meet their friends in the street, catch up on gossip, stop for coffee etc.

When it comes to sport, the men are avid soccer fans. Some also play basketball and volleyball. It is unusual for women to play active sports. They are more likely to enjoy embroidery and knitting, listening to music and dancing.

Television watching is very popular – even when a family has guests. Access to a television and a radio will be very important for the Kosovars. The Albanian community in Australia has a sizeable collection of videos and music that they are prepared to share.

(viii) Food and Beverages:

While most of the Kosovars are Muslims, they do not follow the strict dietary rules of their faith, with one important exception: no pork or pork products (ham, bacon, pork fat etc).

Diets of course vary but there are some favourite "comfort foods" such as thick, hearty soups (chicken, white beans, onion etc). Pickled vegetables are also popular.

Bread is an important staple – heavy white bread (pastadura or Vienna), not the light "white sliced" version. It is often accompanied by marmalade.

Mediterranean pastries such as baklava are popular and Kosovar children, like those the world over, are partial to potato chips.

As previously mentioned, coffee is not just a beverage but the focus of social interaction. Coffee is either the thick "Turkish style" coffee or espresso – never instant coffee. Tea is also drunk, often with lots of sugar. Men often consume scotch with their coffee.

(ix) Smoking:

It is very common for adults – both men and women – to smoke heavily and apparently the incidence of smoking has risen in recent years due to the increased tension.

Kosovars will not be familiar with "smoke free zones" or the unspoken tradition that has developed in Australia of not smoking inside.

If the Kosovar airlift proceeds, it will be necessary to think about how to accommodate the Kosovars' habit. When they first arrive they will be very stressed and therefore their need to smoke will be highest. At East Hills consideration will need to be given as to setting aside smoking areas (with coffee) and whether they will be permitted to smoke in their rooms. What ever decisions are made will need to be clearly communicated to the arrivals. Focus should be on outlining the "rules" with respect to smoking as, having lived under several dictatorial regimes, the Kosovars are used to having to obey rules.

(x) Interacting with the Kosovars:

When Kosovars greet each other, they will typically do so warmly, with males greeting other males with two kisses and women three.

Australians should not interpret this familiarity as an invitation for them to behave in the same way. Until a close link is developed, Australians should observe formal and very polite forms of behaviour with the Kosovars:

- when meeting a person for the first time, either shake his/her hand or nod and smile politely;
- there is a ritual of greeting someone which begins with inquiries about the family before asking about the individual's health;
- when someone enters a room it is polite for all those in the room to stand. If you are in a situation where you will be going in and out, you should give those in the room permission to remain seated;
- do not touch a person unless it is in the course of some necessary action (eg a medical examination). This is especially important if the person is a member of the opposite sex;
- do not touch or pick up a child unless the parent has given permission and definitely not when the parents are not present;
- wherever possible, women should deal with women, men with men, and an Australian workers (especially men) should avoid putting themselves in a position where they are alone with a member of the opposite sex;
- if an Australian male needs to speak to a Kosovar woman, he should go through a male family member. Particular care must be taken with unmarried women so as not to be seen to be offending their honour;
- while Kosovar men may not be familiar with being given instructions by women, it will not be seen as offensive if the woman is clearly identified as holding a particular "position";

- all forms of familiar language (eg "love", "sweetheart") should be avoided.

In other words, the emphasis should be on very polite, "old fashioned" courtesies, avoiding the rather familiar and relaxed form of interaction considered "typically Australian". This is not to say that, as the Kosovars become more relaxed in their new environment, there cannot be compromises on both sides.

Another very important courtesy is that when you enter the home/room of a Kosovar family, you should take off your shoes – even if they say that it is alright not to. It is their custom and it is important to respect it – even more so in their new "home".

(xi) Relations with Authority:

Because of the experiences they have had, the Kosovars will be understandably suspicious of police and others in uniform. It is important that it be clearly explained to the Kosovars (especially those on the military bases) that the police/military in Australia are very different to those in Kosova and are here to help them.

(xii) Impact of Torture/Trauma:

Irrespective of whether the Kosovars come via the airlift or through the humanitarian migration program, they will be deeply traumatised by the experiences they have had. This will influence their behaviour and the way they interact with others (both those inside the family and outsiders). Common signs of post-traumatic stress include disrupted sleep patterns, flashbacks, withdrawal and anger.

Each state has specialist torture/trauma counselling services (see section 6) and these can provide detailed briefings for staff working with traumatised refugees as well as counselling and support for the refugees.

Fundamental in the healing process is the ability to regain control in as many areas of their life as possible. For Kosovars involved in the airlift, their life will essentially be on hold while they are in Australia. It is thus important for those working with the Kosovars to find ways for them to make decisions and establish patterns. For women, having the capacity to cook for the family will be very important, so too for the whole family is the ability to entertain. For men, involvement in decision making about the group is necessary, as is participation in meaningful activities within the camp.

(xiii) Contact with Family Members:

Given the importance of family in Kosovar society, separation from family members (even cousins and other more distant relatives) is of great significance, more so when they do not know where the family members are.

The Australian Red Cross can link into the Red Cross's international tracing service which both assists refugees to trace missing relatives and, under certain circumstances, facilitates transmission of messages. The Kosovars who come as part of the airlift will be registered with the Red Cross when they arrive at East Hills and will be made aware of the service. Other Kosovar entrants should be told about the service and assisted to make contact with the Red Cross office in their state (see section 6).

It will also be important to ensure that the Kosovars are given access to ways of making contact with their relatives who have phone/email connections. Sites should be established in all military facilities for this to occur.

(xiv) Access to Information:

Understandably, the Kosovars (especially those on temporary visas) will be vitally interested about developments in their homeland. Internet access should be provided in the camps and daily updates from UNHCR etc (preferably translated into Albanian) posted in the camps. Access to SBS radio's Albanian language program is also important.

(xv) Health Status:

Kosovars who come as part of the airlift will undergo comprehensive health screening at East Hills Barracks and when they leave there, they will have been assessed as posing no public health risk.

Kosovars who enter under the humanitarian program will have undergone health screening prior to arriving in Australia.

(4) THE ALBANIAN COMMUNITY IN AUSTRALIA:

The geographic borders that exist today in the southern Balkan region do not represent ethnic divides and are, in fact, comparatively recent (the borders of Kosovo as we know it being drawn for the first time in 1945). The borders have drawn lines across land inhabited by people who identify as Albanians and have left more of these people outside the country of Albania (approx 3.2m in Kosova, Macedonia and elsewhere) than within its borders (approx 3m). While there are differences between ethnic Albanians from the various countries, they all identify as being "Albanian".

The first Albanians to come to Australia did so in the 1880s, though the first real wave of migration came in the 1920s and 1930s when the United States changed its migration laws. There was a tradition of Albanians going to the USA as labourers and sending home money to their families. The changes meant that the men had to look further afield for opportunities. The first arrivals settled in Western Australia and later groups came to Shepparton in Victoria, then to Queensland and then to other parts of Victoria.

ut, there is relevance is looking at 20th century developments:

1912: Serb–Montenegrin colonisation of Kosova began in a effort to "liberate the local Serarchy during the war and were staunchly anti–communist. They became the cornerstone of the Albanian community in Australia, establishing mosques and community organisations.

The third wave came in the 1960s and 70s – from Albania, Macedonia, Kosova and Montenegro – and like many entrants from the Mediterranean countries at that time, found work as labourers and farmhands.

The fourth wave came in the 1980s, first of Kosovars out of Turkey (where many had been since the 1950s) and then, as things began to deteriorate in Kosova, directly out of Kosova. Since 1989 there has been a slow but steady influx of Kosovars, their numbers being restricted by Australian immigration policy.

The numbers of Albanians in Australia are very hard to determine as they are identified in census statistics by their country of birth (eg Yugoslavia, Macedonia), not their ethnicity. The community estimate that the approximate numbers in the various states are as follows:

- Victoria 11,000
- New South Wales 5,000
- Queensland 2,000
- South Australia 1,500
- Western Australia 500

It is further estimated that approximately 1/4 of these have their links in Kosova.

(5) Chronology of the Conflict:

A first and fundamental point to consider when looking at the current conflict in the Balkans is that neither the Serbs nor the Albanians can lay claim to continuous history in Kosova. As a geographic entity Kosova is very new (1945) and for 500 years up until the end of the 19th century, it was under an external power (the Ottoman Empire). Further, during the long Ottoman period, the state of Serbia did not exist as a distinct entity.

This being said, many commentators link the hostility that exists between current day Serbs and ethnic Albanians to the Battle of Kosovo that took place at Kosovo Polje in central Kosova in 1389. The invading Turks defeated the local Slavic population, thus beginning 500 years of Ottoman rule and sowing the seeds of the intense nationalism seen in the last year. The attachment the Serbs feel to Kosova is further influenced by the presence in Kosova of many old Orthodox monasteries and other historical sites that are afforded great significance in Serbian history.

Others argue that history is clouding the real reasons for the current crisis and that in fact, it has come about as a result of a series of miscalculations by the West, primarily their failure to include Kosova in the Dayton Peace Plan and their misreading of President Milosevic's ability to rouse nationalist sentiments amongst the population of Serbia. To understand how this has come about, there is relevance in looking at 20th century developments:

1912: Serb–Montenegrin colonisation of Kosova began in an effort to "liberate the local Serb population from the Turks". A further southward push came in 1918.

1945: Creation of the second Yugoslav state. In the ensuing years, Kosova was given increasing autonomy, culminating in a 1974 Constitution in which it was afforded almost the same degree of autonomy as Yugoslavia's constituent republics, although it lacked the constitutional right to secede.

1981: In March and April ethnic Albanian demonstrators voiced calls for Kosova to be made a full republic. Their demonstrations were violently broken up and a state of emergency followed. Nationalist unrest in the province grew throughout the 1980s. Serbs increasingly claimed that the 1974 Constitution had placed them in an intentionally weak position in Yugoslavia.

1987: In April Slobodan Milosevic made his now famous speech at Kosovo Polje promising the Serbs that "no one should dare to beat you!". His eloquent speech in defence of the Serbs was widely broadcast and it is seen as the defining incident in catapulting Milosevic to party leadership by July of that year. Milosevic, like no other leader before him, broke the taboo and played "the ethnic card", arguing the supremacy of one ethnic group over the others in Yugoslavia.

1989: President Milosevic stripped Kosova of self-rule, soon reducing it to an administrative region of Serbia. Albanian language and cultural institutions were suppressed. The following year, Serbia dissolved Kosova's government.

1991: After a secret referendum, ethnic Albanian leaders proclaimed an independent "Republic of Kosova". Ethnic Albanians went on to elect a political assembly and a president and to establish parallel systems of health, education and other institutions. Serbia declared both the referendum and the elections illegal.

1990s The pattern of human rights violations against ethnic Albanians in Kosova became more widespread. Police systematically raided the houses of ethnic Albanians on the pretext of searching for arms, and many beatings have occurred. Many Albanians were targeted for their involvement in the "parallel" society or their political activism. The Serbian authorities consistently failed to provide fair trials in political cases and only rarely were police held accountable for their actions. The situation was such that between 1989 and 1997 around half a million Kosova Albanians left their home country and sought asylum in other European countries.

1996: An armed opposition force emerged in the form of the Kosova Liberation Army (KLA or UCK: Ushtria Clirimtare e Kosoves). It took a more violent approach than Kosova's main political party, the Democratic League of Kosova (LDK: Lidhja Demokratike e Kosoves). In addition to the continuing human rights abuses, other factors undoubtedly lead to its emergence:

- the intractability of the Serbian leadership when faced with demands for increased autonomy for Kosova;
- frustration at the exclusion of the Kosova issue from the Dayton peace agreement that ended the fighting in Bosnia Hercegovina; and
- the growing nationalism of the Kosovars.

The KLA claims to fight for an independent state made up of "the Albanian lands of Kosova, Montenegro and Macedonia". In reality, the KLA is not a single entity and in many cases is really a series of local militias made up of people who have taken up arms in defence of their village/town. This withstanding, by early 1998 the KLA had gained effective control over almost half of Kosova.

1998: In February Slobodan Milosevic ordered a large scale operation against the KLA, sending in over 50,000 army, police and paramilitary forces. In the following months the province was enveloped by a wave of violence that left hundreds dead, thousands wounded and hundreds of thousands displaced both within the territory and further afield. While the majority of those affected have been ethnic Albanians, ethnic Serbs and others in the region (including the Krajina Serbs who had been enticed to settle in Kosova) have also been targeted.

Since their arrival, the Serbian combatants have had the advantage of a comprehensive arsenal of weapons. The KLA were fighting with mostly outdated and

exclusively light weapons and were hampered by lack of a central structure and lack of clear command in the field. During the months of June, July and August the fighting intensified. After initial successes on the battlefields, the KLA was driven from most of their strongholds during the month of August.

While the violence has often been indiscriminate or retaliatory, certain groups of people are considered at particular risk:

- political, humanitarian and human rights activists, journalists and lawyers;
- able bodied men – especially in municipalities affected by the fighting;
- civilians in areas where the KLA is active;
- KLA combatants;
- relatives of real or supposed members of the KLA;
- members of local emergency groups; and
- persons who give shelter to displaced persons.

By September 1998 there was active conflict in 18 out of Kosova's 29 municipalities and over 400 villages were affected. The number of displaced people had grown to an estimated 400,000, around a quarter of Kosova's population. Around 20,000 houses had been destroyed or damaged to such an extent that they had become uninhabitable.

The USA and Europe sent a number of envoys to FRY to attempt to secure a negotiated solution between the opposing parties. These encountered many obstacles, not least being the fragmentation of the Kosova Albanians and the unwillingness on both sides to abandon their prime objectives. The failure of these missions led the UN Security Council to demand a ceasefire and NATO to prepare for an offensive against the Milosevic Government.

Late September saw staff at embassies in Belgrade on evacuation alert and in early October, Australian diplomatic staff, together with those of other embassies, left the country in advance of the expected airstrikes. At the eleventh hour (in mid October), a ceasefire was negotiated and the immediate threat abated. Few, however, believed that the crisis was over.

1999: As the year began, the ceasefire was breached on more and more occasions and in the end, it was conceded that it was no more than a pretence. In February talks were held in the French town of Rambouillet in an effort to broker a negotiated solution. The talks failed and Serb militias and military forces stepped up their efforts to force the Kosovars out of Kosova.

On 24 March NATO began its aerial attack on Yugoslavia which continues up until the time of writing. Forced displacement continues on a massive scale, with some 600,000 Kosovars crossing into neighbouring countries since March.