

Canada's Interests and Policy Options

With evidence of new massacres in September 1998, Canada and the international community is feeling compelled to take action to protect ethnic Albanians in Kosovo. Under the periodic massacre, is a foundation of systematic violation of political and human rights of ethnic Albanians by Serb police and an apartheid-like system. Kosovo's humanitarian needs are acute with as many as 500,000 refugees and internally displaced persons requiring food, shelter and medical care. Kosovo's armed conflict with Serbia threatens to undermine our enormous investments in Balkan stability, particularly in Bosnia.

Resolution of Human Rights Issues in Kosovo The Kosovo crisis is first and foremost a human rights problem. Had basic human rights and democratic rights been observed in Kosovo, it is highly unlikely that the Albanian desire for Kosovo independence or greater autonomy would have erupted into violent terrorist attacks. If Serbia continues its policy of repression and brutality towards the Kosovar Albanians, more and more Albanians will demand independence and support violence as a necessary means for national and self-preservation. Conversely, if the political and human rights of Albanians are respected, support for KLA demands and tactics will diminish. Before any progress can be made in resolving Kosovo's political status, the basic human rights and democratic rights of the Albanian community must be ensured.

Albanians and Serbs may be able to find common ground in guaranteeing the rights of all citizens in Kosovo. If terrorist attacks against Kosovar Serbs and police by the KLA stopped and the KLA were disarmed, Milosevic could claim victory in the eyes of his constituents. Ibrahim Rugova, president of the Kosovo shadow government and well-respected pacifist, could very well support an end to Serb brutality and a restoration of civil rights and Albanian educational and cultural institutions as existed prior to 1989 without insisting upon a formal change in Kosovo's political status.

What specifically can the international community do to improve respect for human rights and democratic rights in Kosovo? As a first step, the situation needs to be monitored by impartial bodies such as the European Union and UN Commission on Human Rights, both of which have expressed an interest in establishing offices in Pristina. An increased field presence by the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) would also be welcome. As well as monitoring the human and political rights situation, these international bodies could monitor the implementation of any new agreements, including the recently signed education accord.

The United Nations' War Crimes Tribunal with jurisdiction over the Balkan region is to investigate whether war crimes have been committed by Serbs. The United States has contributed more than one million dollars for the tribunal. While this effort is important given the atrocities committed, it should not become a focal point or centre piece of Western reaction to the Kosovo conflict. A war crimes tribunal may serve justice and mete out punishment, but it will not end Kosovo's long-standing human rights problems.

The international community should undertake the monitoring and protection of human rights in Kosovo in such a way as to emphasize that both Serbs and Albanians will be protected and with the intent of getting formal agreements on issues of human rights between the Albanian leaders and Milosevic. The international bodies should be clear that they are there to protect the political and human rights of all citizens of Kosovo regardless of ethnicity. Progress may be made incrementally on a variety of mutually beneficial human rights issues that develop a pattern of cooperation and agreement.