

Introduction

Sometimes described as a mountain-ringed 'island', Kosova's unearthly beauty stands in stark contrast to the hatred, division and prejudice that threatens to overshadow this newly independent territory.



History

Kosova became part of the Ottoman Empire in 1389. Many Christians converted to Islam during this time as Muslims were given preferential treatment. In 1877 the Ottoman Empire made Kosova a separate province.

In 1910 an Albanian insurrection broke out in the Kosova province leading to international recognition in 1913 of the region as part of Serbia. Five years later Serbia became part of the kingdom of Yugoslavia. The Yugoslav government tried to remove the Albanian population from Kosova and Macedonia and resettle the area with Serbian people, causing widespread anger amongst the Albanians.

During World War II the kingdom of Yugoslavia was dissolved and then divided between Germany and Italy. Most of Kosova was given to Italian-occupied Greater Albania, while a smaller section was handed over to German-occupied Serbia and Bulgaria. Armed Albanians in Kosova expelled an estimated 70,000 to 100,000 Kosovan Serbs during the occupation. Many Kosovan Serbs lost their lives.

After the war Kosova was made an autonomous region of Communist Serbia and later, in 1963, became an autonomous province.

The 1980s was a time of great ethnic tension between Serb and Albanian communities – Serbs wanted closer ties with Serbia, while Albanians favoured greater autonomy.

In 1987 Slobodan Milosevic gained Serbian public support and took control of the Serbian government. Two years later Kosova's autonomy was significantly reduced by a Serbian referendum and the introduction of a new constitution.

In 1990, following a series of events that Kosovan Albanians saw as an attack on their rights, violence broke out. By 1996 after following what appeared to be an ineffective non-violent resistance, the Kosova Liberation Army (KLA) was formed.

The KLA began attacking Serbian security forces and in March 1998 the Yugoslav army joined Serbian police to fight the Albanian separatists. In the next months many people, especially Albanians, were killed, and over 200,000 people fled their homes.

In March 1999 war broke out after negotiations between Serbian and Albanian representatives failed. The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) intervened but fighting between Albanian and Serbian forces continued.

The signing of the Kumanovo agreement by the Serbian and Yugoslav governments ended the Kosova War in June 1999. Governance of Kosova was transferred to the United Nations (UN) and the Nato-led Kosova Force (KFOR) provided security to the UN.

Between March 1998 and April 1999 nearly 640,000 Albanians were either forced to flee Kosova or expelled. Thousands of refugees lived in temporary camps and shelters.

Further unrest broke out between Serbians and Albanians in March 2004. Two years later international negotiations by the UN Security Council began in order to determine the final status of Kosova. On 17 February 2008 independence from Serbia was declared, though this has only been partially recognised internationally. On 15 June 2008 a new constitution was officially brought into being in the Albanian parts of Kosova only. The Serbs have rejected 'independence', stating that Kosova is still a part of Serbia.

The technically correct term for this province is Kosovo as it is legally part of Serbia and

Montenegro but BMS uses 'Kosova' because it is the chosen name of the Albanians and we work among Albanians.

Current challenges

- ▶ Over 40 per cent of the population are unemployed (some say as many as 65 per cent). Approximately 45 per cent of the population live in poverty (below €1.42 per day) and 15 per cent in extreme poverty (€0.93 per day).
- ▶ Kosova has become a major centre for drugs and the trafficking of women.

BMS involvement in Kosova

BMS World Mission first became involved in Kosova through the work of the BMS emergency team of volunteers in Albania. Four of the volunteers accompanied returning refugees in 1999 and spent five weeks with them as they resettled in their devastated country. In 2000 BMS volunteers worked with 'Love in Action', a local relief work group.

Justine Horsfall started as a long-term BMS worker in 2001. In 2004, she began working as manager of the Association of International Missions (AIM) in Prishtina. AIM is an inter-denominational Christian networking organisation for over a hundred mission workers, providing encouragement, prayer support, information and practical services.

Background Information

The land

Kosova has some of the most fertile land in the Balkans as well as areas of rugged mountain terrain. It is an area of small farms and grains; fruits and vegetables are all grown. Tobacco is grown as a commercial crop in some areas.

In spite of its fertility, Kosova, even before the present situation, was one of the poorest and least developed parts of Yugoslavia.

There are mineral resources in the region, including coal.

Religion

Kosova is predominantly Muslim (70 per cent) with minority religions of Eastern Orthodox (15 per cent), Roman Catholicism (4 per cent), Protestantism (less than 1 per cent) and other religions (10 per cent). Historically the Orthodox Church has been very influential but has little

influence in present day Kosova. The relief work undertaken by the Christian community has influenced the previous suspicious views of the majority. There has been a rapid growth in evangelical groups and the need to build up those young in the Christian faith is pressing.

Prayer points

- ▶ Pray for the Church in Kosova to be united and strong in faith as it struggles to be recognised and to do simple things like repairing buildings in need of maintenance.
- ▶ Pray against human trafficking.
- ▶ For thousands of young people who do not see a future or have a hope. Teenage suicide is now at an all-time high.
- ▶ Pray that God would bring about reconciliation between the Albanians and Serbs after decades of bitter hatred and unforgiveness. Pray too that Jesus would heal the broken lives of those who have suffered and raise up Christians to be peacemakers on both sides.

FURTHER INFORMATION

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BMS World Mission
PO Box 49 Didcot OX11 8XA
T: 01235 517700
E-mail: mail@bmsworldmission.org

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