

Serbs protest as UN vows to catch Kosovo killers
Stephen Coates, *Agence France Presse*, 08/15/03

Angry Serbs took to the streets of Kosovo on Thursday as United Nations police launched house-to-house searches for gunmen who murdered two Serb youths in a suspected hate crime. Hundreds of international police cordoned off the scene of Wednesday's attack, at a small river near Zahac some 60 kilometres (40 miles) west of the provincial capital Pristina, and were knocking on doors throughout the surrounding countryside, UN police spokesman Derek Chappell said. The victims, from the Serb enclave of Gorazdevac, were swimming in the river when at least one gunman opened fire with a Kalashnikov rifle from nearby bushes, killing one instantly and fatally wounding the other.

"Right now we have the whole area locked down and last night we had around 300 police officers doing a detailed search, going from house to house," Chappell said. Police initially said the victims were teenagers but their names and ages have still not been officially released. Local media however reported that one was just 11 years old. Two of the injured were in critical condition, and one had been flown to hospital in Belgrade with head wounds, Chappell said.

The murders came an hour after Kosovo's new UN administrator, Harri Holkeri, arrived in the southern Serbian province for the first time to meet local and international officials. Speaking at his first press conference here later Thursday, the former Finnish prime minister said it was time the "man on the street" took responsibility for ending the "barbarism" of inter-ethnic violence. He said the UN Security Council had been briefed on the attack, and vowed to pursue the culprits. But Serb leaders said the UN mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) and the NATO protection force (KFOR) was partially to blame for ignoring the problem of festering Albanian hatred toward the province's Serb minority.

The United States condemned the shooting as an "atrocious" committed by "enemies of peace". "By targeting young people and their potential to build a better Kosovo, free from the violence of the past, they attacked Kosovo's future itself," Tom Casey, a State Department spokesman. European Commission chief Romano Prodi also condemned the attack, but it would not derail the peace process there. Kosovo remains wracked by ethnic tension four years after the 1998-99 war between Serbian security forces and separatist guerrillas from the province's ethnic-Albanian majority.

The war ended with the establishment of a UN protectorate after NATO military intervention to drive Serbian forces out of the province. "We're all absolutely depressed. We don't know who to turn to for protection," Serb political leader Oliver Ivanovic told AFP as some 3,000 Serbs protested in the divided northern town of Kosovska Mitrovica.

The protesters carried banners reading "Serbia Wake Up" and "Europe Open Your Eyes". Elsewhere, some 400 Serbs blocked a main road in the north of the province. In Belgrade, the Serbian government declared Friday a national day of mourning. KFOR's deputy commander, Major General Yves de Kermabon, said security had been tightened to "provide reassurance to the Serbian community in Kosovo". "Such cowardly attacks on defenseless children are truly

sickening and are conducted by those who seek to destabilise Kosovo and undermine all the progress made over the past four years," Kermabon said.

UN police earlier said the attack appeared to have been ethnically motivated, although they could not confirm the gunmen were Albanians. UN sources said they feared an upsurge in violence ahead of proposed talks between Kosovo Albanian officials and the Serbian government, which would be the first since the end of the war. The attack on Wednesday has already aggravated tensions between the two sides, with the Serbian government in Belgrade calling it an act of "terrorism" designed as a "welcome programme" for Holkeri. Serbian Foreign Minister Goran Svilanovic said it was "tragic confirmation that the UN and NATO have failed" in Kosovo. If it is confirmed as a hate crime, it would be the worst known incident of ethnic violence in Kosovo since a bus full of Serbs was blown up in 2000, killing 11 people.