
SERBS CANCEL KOSOVO CHRISTMAS TRIP TO AVOID PROTEST

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Serb pilgrims who planned to travel from Serbia to visit the church in Gjakova/Djakovica for Orthodox Christmas on January 6 said on Friday that they have cancelled their trip after a protest was announced by local Kosovo Albanians.

The Association of Serbs from Djakovica accused unknown persons of creating a climate of hysteria and potential violence ahead of the visit, and said it would request an urgent meeting with international institutions in Kosovo and officials in Pristina.

We are not frightened. We continue the struggle to reclaim our dignity, human and religious rights, it said in a press release.

Kosovo Albanians in Gjakova/Djakovica had announced they would hold a peaceful protest on Saturday to oppose what they called the visit by Serbian criminals in the name of a pilgrimage.

They accuse some of the pilgrims of being responsible for crimes committed during the Kosovo war.

Sava Janjic, the abbot of the Visoki Decani Serbian Orthodox monastery in Kosovo, lamented the cancellation of the Serbs visit.

So sad that Kosovo remains a territory in Europe where Christians cant celebrate Christmas in peace, Janjic wrote on Twitter.

The annual Christmas trip from Serbia to the Orthodox church in Gjakova/Djakovica has attracted controversy and violence in the past.

The organisers of the protest, which they said will go ahead on Saturday morning despite the Serbs cancellation, claimed they had the support of civil society and local residents.

There have been similar protests against the Serb pilgrims in previous years.

In January 2015, large demonstrations among Kosovo Albanians also erupted after a Kosovo Serb minister, Aleksandar Jablanovic, described protesters who demonstrated against the Serb pilgrims visit as savages.

The protesters had thrown ice at the bus carrying the pilgrims, claiming that some of them had taken part in war crimes during the 1998-99 conflict.

Jablanovic apologised, but Kosovos prime minister at the time, Isa Mustafa, eventually sacked him as Minister for Returnees in February 2015.

The Kosovo Albanians also filed a criminal complaint against Gjakova/Djakovicas Serb former mayor Djokica Stanojevic, claiming he committed crimes during the Kosovo war.

We have launched a criminal complaint against the former mayor of Gjakova, Djokica Stanojevic, who participated in committing crimes, because he and others come to Gjakova in the name of a pilgrimage while theyre the same people who participated in war crimes, alleged one of the organisers, Ideal Zhaveli.

Stanojevic, who is now the head of the Association of Expelled Serbs from Gjakova/Djakovica, denied that he was responsible for any war crimes, adding that he was not in office during the Kosovo conflict in 1998 and 1999.

Everybody in Djakovica knows who I am and what I was doing [at the time], Stanojevic told BIRN in a brief statement.

Ali Selimaj, the head of Basic Prosecution in Gjakova/Djakovica, told BIRN that it received the request on Thursday for an indictment to be raised against Stanojevic and has now sent it to the Special Prosecution in Pristina.

Gjakova/Djakovica prosecution today delivered the lawsuit against former mayor Djokica Stanojevic that was filed by citizens to the Kosovo Special Prosecution, because the Special Prosecution deals with war crimes, Selimaj told BIRN on Friday.

<http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/kosovo-albanians-warn-protest-against-serb-pilgrims-in-gjakova-01-05-2018>

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