



## **Albania – Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on 28 August 2015**

### **Information on the prevalence of blood feuds in Albania and the ability of the State to protect citizens who are threatened by families involved in blood feuds.**

*A Xinhua General News Service report states:*

“In Albania, blood feud exists in some rural areas. More than 5,500 Albanian families are currently engaged in blood feuds. There are now more than 20,000 men and boys who live under an ever-present death sentence because of blood feuds. Since 1992, at least 10,000 Albanians have been killed due to blood feuds.” (Xinhua General News Service (24 April 2014) *Sniper kills old man in Albania*)

*An Agence France Presse report states:*

“Since they were born, nine-year-old Nikolin and his older brother Amarildo, 12, have never left their house in Albania. They do not play outside, nor do they go to school. The boys are imprisoned because of a blood feud, or vendetta, with neighbours that has made them fear for their lives. Their uncle killed a neighbour in a 1993 dispute and, although he was jailed for 25 years, the victim's family -- living only a dozen metres (yards) away -- has vowed to avenge the death. Albanians still respect the tradition of vendetta, which dates back to the 15th century and spares no male in a family, including babies. The brutal custom is widely followed in the poor mountainous regions in the north of the country, but also in some villages and towns in other regions.” (Agence France Presse (6 October 2013) *Doomed lives of Albania's children of vendetta*)

*A Reuters report states:*

“Blood feuds are not specific to one religious group, however the phenomenon exists almost exclusively in northern Albania. Citizens in the southern part of the country balk at the tradition held by some of their neighbors in the rural, poorer north. Geographically isolated by mountainous terrain, northern villages maintained more autonomy under 46 years of Communist rule and preserved more customary laws of the Kanun. After the regime's fall in 1991, renewed disputes over land and weakened rule of law led to a resurgence of blood feuds. Free movement and migration became legal and citizens from rural areas flocked to cities, spreading blood feuds to bigger population centers.” (Reuters (10 December 2015) *Albanian 'blood feuds' force families into isolation*)

The *US Department of State* report on Albania for the events of 2014, in a section titled “Arbitrary or Unlawful Deprivation of Life”, states:

“Incidents of societal killings, including both ‘blood feud’ and revenge killings, occurred during the year. Such killings at times involved criminal gangs. Although long-standing traditions surrounding blood feuds prohibit killing children or women, nongovernmental

organizations (NGOs) reported cases in which perpetrators intentionally targeted minors or women. The ombudsman reported that authorities' efforts to protect families or prevent blood feud killings were insufficient." (US Department of State (25 June 2015) *2014 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – Albania*, p.2)

This section of the report also states:

"The police reported four blood feud killings during the first six months of the year. Other NGOs reported higher numbers, but data were unreliable. In 2013 the government amended the law to increase penalties for premeditated murder, when committed for a blood feud, from 20 years' or life imprisonment to no less than 30 years' or life imprisonment. Jurisdiction over blood feud cases was transferred from district courts to the serious crimes courts." (ibid, p.3)

A report from the *UN Human Rights Council*, in a section titled "Continued occurrence of blood feud killings" (paragraph 12), states:

"At present, blood feuds and related killings appear to still occur in Albania and constitute an issue of concern. The lack of comprehensive and fully reliable statistical data renders it difficult to refer to concrete figures of the current scope of the phenomenon and analyse its dynamics. In parallel, information received from various sources confirms that such killings still affect the population in some parts of the country, in particular in the northern areas of Albania. Some families still opt for self-isolation due to fear of reprisal." (UN Human Rights Council (23 April 2013) *Report of the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, Addendum: Follow-up to country recommendations: Albania*, pp.5-6)

In paragraph 13 this report states:

"According to the information provided to the Special Rapporteur by the Government of Albania, the official statistics of the General Directorate of State Police indicate that five blood feud killings and five revenge motivated killings occurred in 2010; five blood feud killings and four revenge motivated killings took place in 2011; and two blood feud killings and two revenge motivated killings were registered in the first six months of 2012. According to the same source, as of early April 2013, there were 67 self-isolated families due to blood feuds, and 33 children not attending school for the same reason. Of those children, 23 were registered in the region of Shkodra, in northern Albania." (ibid, p.6)

In paragraph 14 this report refers to statistical data for blood feud related killings as follows:

"Furthermore, the current statistical data gathered by the Ministry of Justice from district courts, as made available by the Government of Albania, indicate that 50 cases of revenge and blood feud killings were filed with the courts in the period from January 2010 to June 2012. A total of 24 cases were filed in 2010, 17 cases were filed in 2011, while the first six months of 2012 registered 9 cases. From the point of view of the Government, these figures from the Ministry of Justice indicate a trend of reduction of blood feud crimes during the last two years. However, it is unclear to the Special Rapporteur to what extent the statistical data provided on cases in courts reflect the

actual situation of blood feud-related killings in the country. He recalls in this regard the comments made by his predecessor on the challenges to accurately define the extent of the phenomenon, due to the parallel use of several differing definitions and the fragmentation of statistical data, as well as to the possible underreporting by both affected families and officials.” (ibid, p.6)

Regarding penalties for blood feud murder paragraph 15 of the report states:

“According to credible information received by the Special Rapporteur, blood feud killings continue to occur in part due to a tendency of the judiciary to impose lighter sentences on perpetrators, despite the fact that the Criminal Code of Albania provides for serious penalties for blood feud murder or threat.” (ibid, p.6)

Paragraph 16 states:

“The Special Rapporteur received further information that current blood feud killings sometimes no longer follow the traditional pattern established by the Kanun rules, which reportedly authorize the killing of male members of a family, and strictly forbid killing women and children. In the current context, following a conflict situation, there are cases where a person may feel vindicated in killing the other individual or any member of his family, including women and children. In this regard, the Special Rapporteur notes with concern the reported killing, in a blood feud, of a 14-year-old girl in May 2012.” (ibid, p.6)

An article from the online edition of the German news magazine *Spiegel* states:

“Blood feuds still exist in Albania and those involved have to live a life in hiding. They include people like Leonard Qukaj, who has left his home only rarely in the last four years for fear of being murdered by a rival clan -- or by his own uncle.” (Spiegel Online (6 June 2014) *'We'll Get You': An Albanian Boy's Life Ruined by Blood Feuds*)

In a paragraph headed “Spilled Blood” this article states:

“Shkoder is just as deeply divided as the rest of the country. On the one hand, it is a place looking optimistically to the future; this week, Albania was given the green light by the European Commission as an EU accession candidate. On the other hand, it is a country where corruption, human trafficking and organized crime are all present. It is a country where blood feuds are still prevalent -- of the kind that could soon cost Leonard his life. ‘Spilled blood must be met with spilled blood’: Such is the edict of the Kanun, a set of traditional Albanian laws that stems from the 15th century. It is a parallel system of justice focusing on honor, guilt and vengeance, and remains in effect in rural regions. And here in Shkoder. It threatens entire families, including children and teenagers. And the feuds that result often begin with a seemingly harmless quarrel.” (ibid)

See also paragraph headed “We're Going to Get You” which states:

“The state has played down the problem for years. The police chief of Shkoder claims that cases of blood revenge have fallen dramatically, with only 208 reported in the region since 1991. And yet, he says, thousands of Albanians have sought asylum abroad, claiming their lives were in danger because of a feud. It's his belief that they have abused the tradition in order to seek better lives in Europe. But the government has

nonetheless tightened penalties for blood feud crimes. Until very recently, perpetrators faced maximum prison sentences of 25 years, but the figure has now been increased to 40. "But people like Leonard, his cousins and his brother are still hunted as a result of this tradition. Non-governmental organizations estimate that around 1,500 young men around the country are forced to hide in their homes because they are targeted. If they reach adulthood, they often become killers themselves to avenge their families." (ibid)

A *Balkan Insight* article states:

"The scale of the problem is hard to monitor as there are deep discrepancies in statistics on blood feuds and related killings. Local media and non-governmental organizations refer to dozens of blood-feud killings per year and to hundreds of children living in isolation as a consequence. On the other hand, government statistics claim that such killings fell sharply in number over the last decade. According to the Ombudsman's report, there were 98 murders due to vendettas from 2001 to 2012, including five in the first nine months of the last year. 'Murders due to blood feuds account for 34.4 per cent of the murders that have occurred in Albania in the past two decades,' the report notes. 'In most cases the person who committed the murder was pressed by his family to commit the crime,' it added. From 2001 until 2012, 1,559 families in Albania were involved in blood feuds, while a decade earlier the figure was 8,229 families." (Balkan Insight (3 April 2013) *Blood Feuds Still Blight Albanian Lives, Report Says*)

In a speech at the blood feud phenomenon round table British Ambassador Nicholas Cannon commented on blood feuds as follows:

"From my perspective, there are four main problems in tackling the blood feud phenomenon. The first is lack of objective information. Nobody seems to have a clear idea of how common blood feuds are. Whenever my embassy has asked the Albanian State Police, their advice and statistics suggest that blood feuds of the classic type are relatively rare, and the number of killings as a result of such feuds is very few. Of course the climate of fear created by feuds is not necessarily linked directly to the number of deaths. But this would suggest that the blood feud phenomenon is a small and localised problem. The press, which reports murders every day in Albania, also rarely carries stories of what one might describe as the classic blood feud situation. However, NGOs and the Office of the Ombudsman are convinced that official figures do not reflect the reality of a much wider problem involving thousands of families. They argue that there is either a deliberate or inadvertent official cover-up of a grave situation. So we don't even know the scale of the problem we are dealing with." (UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office (13 December 2013) *Speech: The blood feud phenomenon*)

Paragraph 2.2.3 of a *UK Home Office* Report quotes an FCO letter from the British Embassy in Tirana as follows:

"Previous Country Information Guidance on blood feud in Albania cited a 2002 NGO report in which it was claimed that 'most of the houses in Northern Albania look like fortresses built of stone, with small apertures serving as windows. Even to date many Albanians shut themselves inside their houses where they remain isolated for life in order to escape from blood vengeance'. This is simply not true. Embassy staff travel widely to all parts of Albania. Most towns in northern Albania are bustling provincial centres with no sign that 'many Albanians shut themselves in for life'. The passage

bears no relation to reality and is misleading. There remain a small number of such towers, but these are historical relics.’ “(UK Home Office (17 March 2015) *Country Information and Guidance – Albania: Blood feuds*, p.10)

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research and Information Unit within time constraints. This response is not and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

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