



Refugee Documentation Centre (Ireland)
LEGAL AID BOARD

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Information on effects on children of being sequestered indoors for four years in the context of blood feuds

The *New York Times* in July 2008 reports:

“The National Reconciliation Committee, an Albanian nonprofit organization that works to eliminate the practice of blood feuds, estimates that 20,000 people have been ensnared by blood feuds since they resurfaced after the collapse of Communism in 1991, with 9,500 people killed and nearly 1,000 children deprived of schooling because they are locked indoors” (New York Times (10 July 2008) *In Albanian Feuds, Isolation Engulfs Families*).

BBC News in November 2008 states:

“Hundreds of children across Albania are living virtually imprisoned in their homes - for fear of being killed in blood feuds under the country's ancient vendetta code...” (BBC News (18 November 2008) *Albania's young blood feud 'hostages'*).

This report also states:

“The non-governmental National Reconciliation Committee (NRC), a group that tries to mediate between warring families, estimates that several thousand Albanian families are currently embroiled in feuds nationwide, leaving some 800 children confined to their homes” (ibid).

In February 2010 the *United Nations Human Rights Council* states:

“The existence of a mentality which encourages blood feuds is a continuing concern in Albania, warned the UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial killings, Philip Alston, on Tuesday at the end of a 9-day mission to the country, where he focused on blood feud killings and domestic violence*. “Blood feuds killings – revenge killings by a victim's family against the killer's family – continue to have corrosive affects on society, especially the practice of self-isolation by families who fear revenge killings, and a still widespread belief in the justness of collective punishment of innocent family members,” said Alston. “However, the number of blood feud has decreased significantly over the past 5 years. Civil society organisations and some media reports have clearly inflated the extent of blood feud killings,” the UN expert said. “While the true numbers are closer to those provided by the Government, official figures – especially relating to isolated children and families – are probably too low.” Alston urged the Government to conduct a survey and analysis of the blood feud phenomenon in Albania, and take greater steps to facilitate reconciliation between families. He emphasised the importance of education on human rights to address the root causes of blood feuds” (United Nations Human Rights Council (23 February 2010) *Albania can do more to eliminate blood feuds and domestic violence, says UN expert on extrajudicial killings*).

The *United Nations Human Rights Council* in May 2010 states:

“There are deep discrepancies in the statistics concerning blood feuds and related killings. At one extreme, media reports have referred to hundreds of blood feud killings per year and thousands of children living in isolation. At the other extreme, according to Government statistics, such killings fell steadily from 45 in 1998 to one in 2009, while the number of isolated children ranges from 36 to 57 countrywide, of which 29 to 45 are in Shkodra” (United Nations Human Rights Council (20 May 2010) *Report of the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, Philip Alston; Addendum; Preliminary note on the mission to Albania (15–23 February 2010)* [A/HRC/14/24/Add.9],p.4).

This report also states:

“Important steps have been taken in the past five years to address blood feuds. The Criminal Code has been amended in important respects (minimum sentences and specific criminalization of blood feuds and blood feud killings), specialized police units have been created, a high-level coordination committee on blood feuds was established in 2005, and the “Second Chance” programme provides home schooling for isolated children” (ibid,p.6).

Research published in October 2010 by the *Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada* states:

“Statistics on the number of families who live in isolation out of fear of blood-feud reprisal also vary widely (Balkan Insight 8 Apr. 2010; UN 20 May 2010, para. 8-9). According to the UN Special Rapporteur, different government departments provided figures that range from 124 to 133 families in isolation across the country, with 36 to 57 isolated children as a result; most of whom-29 to 45-live in the northwest city of Shkodra [also spelled Shkodër] (ibid.)” (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (15 October 2010) *Statistics on blood feuds; state protection and support services available to those affected by blood feuds, including whether individuals have been prosecuted for blood-feud-related crimes (2007 - September 2010)*).

This research also notes:

“Several sources report that the Albanian government is providing educational assistance to the children of families isolated because of blood feuds (AFCR 24 Sept. 2010; Honorary Research Fellow 22 Sept. 2010; Professor 15 Sept. 2010; UN 20 May 2010, para. 14; Seven, The Sunday Telegraph Magazine 20 June 2010) through a program called “Second Chance” (ibid.; UN 20 May 2010, para. 14; Balkan Insight 8 Apr. 2010). According to the head of the Shkodra school district, reports regional media source Balkan Insight, 41 such children in the region are receiving home schooling based on a curriculum approved by the Ministry of Education (ibid.). The UN Special Rapporteur notes that the Second Chance program offers schooling only up to grade nine (UN 20 May 2010, para. 14)” (ibid).

In November 2010 a report issued by the *European Commission* states:

“The protection of the right to life is enshrined in the Constitution. Albania ratified Protocol No 13 to the European Convention on Human Rights abolishing the death penalty under all circumstances in 2007. The number of blood feud killings has decreased, due notably to better policing. Specific criminalisation of blood feuds and blood feud killings, the creation of specialised police units and the establishment of a

high-level Coordination Committee have been important steps in this field. However, the incidence of these killings continues to result in the families concerned being self-isolated due to fear of reprisals, thus depriving children of basic rights such as inclusive education. The government has taken measures to improve access to education of isolated children notably through its "second chance" programme. Additionally, several NGOs have been active in this field, providing support to affected families and contributing to increased awareness of the need to eradicate this phenomenon. Collection of reliable data on blood feud killings is required in order to measure the extent of the problem and address it adequately. Community education, outreach and measures aimed at reconciliation of families are also needed" (European Commission (9 November 2010) *Analytical Report: Commission Opinion on Albania's application for membership of the European Union*,p.25).

No further information on this issue could be found among sources available to the RDC within time constraints.

References

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This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Refugee Documentation Centre 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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