

WORLD & NATION

Land mines, revenge attacks impede relief efforts

By Barb Frazee
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — Relief workers in Kosovo face the challenge of avoiding land mines while locating people who need their help, said two staffers for Catholic Relief Services.

"Every day we go to the KFOR briefings, and every day there is a new threat about mines" or mine fields, said David Snyder, CRS communications associate working in the Kosovo city of Prizren. KFOR is the NATO-led peacekeeping force.

Tom Garofalo, temporary head of the CRS office in Pristina, the Kosovo capital, said there had been "dozens of mine injuries" among Kosovars.

Garofalo and Snyder spoke to Catholic News Service by cell phone from Kosovo.

Garofalo said one of his assignments was to reopen the CRS office in its three-story building in Pristina. U.N. mine sweepers were uncertain when they would be able to check the office, so on June 24 Garofalo took matters into his own hands.

"To check for booby traps there, I just took a big long pole and started knocking things over from another room," he said.

"I didn't want to let the cleaning lady do it," he said, noting she had offered. U.N. mine sweepers arrived the next day, he added.

Snyder said although Prizren was not hit hard by NATO attacks, the "outlying areas are a lot more heavily damaged" and littered with land mines and booby traps, most left during the Serb withdrawal from Kosovo.

Around Pristina, Garofalo noticed the same thing and said unpaved roads are prime locations for land mines.

"Mainly, everything that is asphalt is safe, but a lot of these villages are down dirt roads," he said.

In conjunction with the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, Catholic Relief Services — the U.S. bishops' international aid and development agency — was making trips to villages to assess the



Reuters/CNS

Kire Jovanka (right), a 77-year-old Serb woman, lies injured in a Prizren Orthodox seminary in Kosovo June 27. She was beaten by ethnic Albanians when they evicted her from her house. The seminary, guarded by German soldiers, was housing about 70 victims of revenge attacks.

needs of the local population.

Garofalo said that besides distributing emergency food packets, aid workers check what percentage of the population has returned, how many internally displaced Kosovars are in the village and the food and utility situation.

For instance, he said, "in a lot of cases their wells were sabotaged with animal corpses or gasoline."

Aid workers also are checking if the village has warehouse space, if there is a local mosque or church providing assistance, and on the physical condition of buildings, including schools.

"We and other agencies, too — some of them, anyway — see the school as more than the school — sort of the central community focal point," he said. UNICEF has set a goal of making sure schools are up

and running by Sept. 1, when the school year starts.

"That's a huge job," Garofalo said. He said one of the biggest challenges CRS faces is "getting the nuts and bolts of the food pipeline in place and also the distribution network."

"As a rule, people are not starving; they have small quantities of food," Garofalo said. "They are getting by by sharing."

"Just about everybody needs some level of food assistance," he added. "There's enough to get by for the short term, but they haven't been able to plant their fields."

The staple in Kosovo is wheat flour, he said. Many people buried wheat in their yards or were able to get some on the way back from Macedonia or Albania. However, he added, people also helped feed

internally displaced people, so supplies are dwindling.

Winter, which begins anywhere from September to November, "is a big concern," Garofalo said, especially since so many people are living with neighbors.

"There's a lot of discussion about how to approach the shelter issue, whether agencies should rebuild houses or winterize one room of houses, he said.

The two CRS workers emphasized that aid agencies and military troops were going out of their way to make sure Serbs as well as ethnic Albanians felt safe.

Snyder said that in a small village on the outskirts of Prizren, some elderly Serbs were attacked and took refuge in an Orthodox seminary. German KFOR troops were protecting them, he said.

Garofalo said that when driving past the village of Chaglavica, he saw Serbs piling up their wagons with their goods and getting ready to leave. He said Irish soldiers were driving through the area with loudspeakers, announcing in two languages that they would protect everyone equally, that people should not loot or burn and that villagers should stay.

Garofalo said that in Pristina, many of the workers in key industries — such as health care or utilities — were Serbs. The United Nations "is protecting them and escorting them to work," he said.

He and Snyder said looking at some of the destruction after NATO and Serb attacks reminded them of images they had seen of the devastation caused by World War II.

Garofalo said he was standing on a cobblestone street in a little village; on both sides were burned-out shops that "were just rubble." He heard a rumbling and saw Italian armored vehicles coming down the street.

"I swear, if it were in black and white, I would have sworn I was in World War II," he said.

"The way we're greeted and the way the KFOR people are greeted, it's like we're liberating them — it's a little unsettling; people throw flowers at you," he added.

High court ruling support rights of mentally impaired

By Mark Pattison
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — Self-determination for people with mental disabilities is at the core of one of the Supreme Court's June rulings on a case testing the limits of the Americans With Disabilities Act, said a Catholic Charities USA official.

"They have said the mentally impaired are entitled to the care which best suits them," Sharon Daly, Catholic Charities vice president for social policy, said of the high court.

Daly added the court's position holds true for both the developmentally disabled and mentally ill.

In the court's June 22 ruling in *Olmstead vs. L.C.*, the court ruled that Lois Curtis and Elaine Wilson had the right to seek placement in a group home facility.

The two women had sued the state of Georgia to get out of a state mental hospital in Atlanta and into community-based care.

Curtis is mildly retarded and has been diagnosed as a schizophrenic. Wilson, also mildly retarded, has a borderline personality disorder.

The state had refused their request and kept them in a mental hospital. They were still there in the days following the Supreme Court's decision, Daly said.

Catholic Charities had filed a friend of the court brief supporting Wilson and Curtis, as did the National Catholic Office for Persons With Disabilities.

Daly said the court's decision also enables the mentally disabled to receive hospital-based treatment if that is their wish,

or that of their guardian.

The ADA states that disabled persons shall not be discriminated against by a government program or service "by reason of their disability." The Justice Department has interpreted that clause to mean that programs must be offered to people with disabilities "in the most integrated setting appropriate to the needs" they have.

Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, writing for the 6-3 court majority, said the discrimination is illegal "when the state's treatment professionals have determined that community placement is appropriate, the transfer from institutional care to less restrictive setting is not opposed by the affected individual, and the placement can be reasonably accommodated,

taking into account the resources available to the state."

Daly said that means that "where the rubber hits the road," advocates for persons with disabilities will have to "push for strategies to ensure there will be enough money for that reform."

In all, Catholic Charities facilities house 100,000 people. Not all of them have mental disabilities, Daly said, and some have mental disabilities combined with physical problems, or may be in a home for the aged, or for troubled or abused youths.

The Supreme Court made three other rulings June 22 in ADA-related cases. Observers took the court's decisions in those cases to be limiting the scope of the ADA.

Catholic Courier (USPS 135-580) Vol. 110 No. 39, July 1, 1999
Published weekly except the last Thursday in December.
Subscription rates: single copy, 75¢; one-year subscription in U.S., \$20.00; Canada and foreign \$20.00 plus postage. Offices: 1150 Buffalo Road, Rochester, N.Y. 14624, 716/328-4340. Periodicals postage paid at Rochester, N.Y.
POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Catholic Courier, P.O. Box 24379, Rochester, N.Y. 14624.

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