

Serbian Patriarch Porfirije conducts memorial service for victims of 2004 violence Kosovo & Metohija



Seventeen years have passed since more 4,000 ethnic Serbs were expelled from the province of Kosovo and Metohija, following a series of attacks by Kosovar Albanian extremists, with most of the displaced still prevented from returning to their homes to this day.

Another 19 people were killed during the wave of violence, eight of them Serbs, while 11 Albanians were killed in a clash with servicemen of international security forces.

At least 170 Serbs were injured, along with dozens of members of the international force, who clashed with local Albanians. About 800 Serb residences were demolished and 35 religious sites were torched, including 18 cultural monuments, among those being the historic Church of Our Lady of Ljevis in Prizren.

The specific church represents medieval Serbian influence and has been partially restored. In 2006 the cathedral was listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

On Wednesday, after the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts, the Patriarch of the Serbian Church, His Holiness Porfirije, conducted a memorial service for his holy

predecessors as well as for the victims of the 2004 violence, at the Monastery of the Peć Patriarchate.

In a message, His Holiness stated:

"Today, in this holy Stauropegic Laura of Serbian patriarchs, the resting place of my Holy predecessors – Serbian archbishops and patriarchs, who are not only witnesses to the existence of, but who were also patrons and creators of the highest European culture through which we ennobled the land of Kosovo and Metohija, we prayed for the souls of our brothers and sisters, who suffered death in the March persecution 17 years ago.

"We also remembered the suffering of 40 years ago, when, also in March, the sleeping quarters of this monastery were burned down. What we see these days is that they are robbing and desecrating our temples. What can be our only answer? We will re-consecrate with prayer what has been desecrated, we will rebuild what has been burned and destroyed; and we will pray to God to give strength to those who remained in Kosovo and Metohija to persevere and build their lives in peace. We will also pray for the destroyers to stop destroying; the arsonists to stop burning, the robbers to stop robbing, because in those very churches we are praying for them, their neighbors and their children.

"Therefore, let us pray today for peace among all people who live in Kosovo and Metohija, regardless of their religion and nation."