

'Ethnic cleansing' ongoing in Kosova

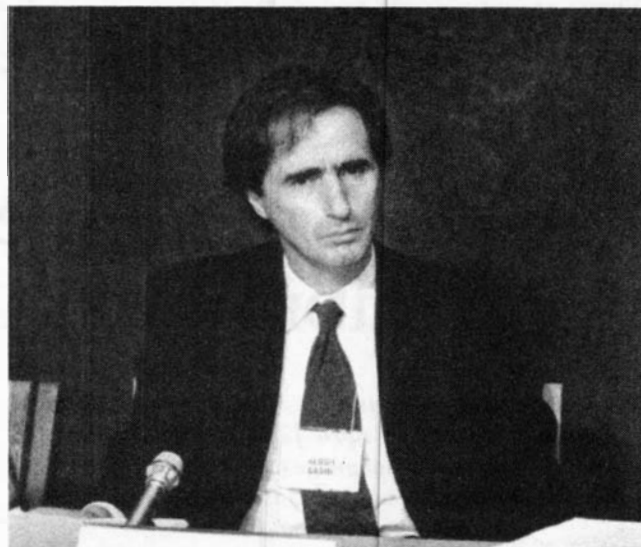
by Laurence Hecht

"Ethnic cleansing" without open war, but with daily police brutality, is the policy of the Serbian police regime in the former Yugoslavian state of Kosova, reported Surgeon General Dr. Alush A. Gashi, a professor of anatomy at the University of Kosova, to a meeting of the Human Rights Committee of the U.S. National Academy of Sciences in Washington, D.C. on May 19.

The targeted population in this case are Albanians, half of whom live not in the Republic of Albania, but in ethnic and compact territories of the former Yugoslavia where they are the third most numerous grouping, he said. Kosova, in the southwestern part of former Yugoslavia, is the largest such concentration, with 2 million ethnic Albanians. Kosova was given status as an autonomous region within Yugoslavia after World War II. It lost its autonomy in recent years when the Republic of Serbia took over the province by police and military forces, abolished the Parliament, dismissed the government, and closed down Albanian-language television, radio and daily newspaper, Dr. Gashi reported.

There then began a process which Dr. Gashi described as "intellectual decapitation." The Faculty of Medicine of the University of Kosova in the capital of Pristina was one of the first institutions to be affected, he said. Under newly imposed laws, Serbs appointed by the Belgrade government began firing Albanian physicians. Top physicians were pulled out of workrooms, offices, and even operating rooms by Serbian police forces. Across Kosova, over 2,000 medical personnel, including 400 doctors, all of them Albanian, have been dismissed for political reasons. Medical workers may be fired merely for communicating in the Albanian language. In the hospitals of Kosova there is not one vascular surgeon, nor one oncologist, Dr. Gashi said. Research at every level is suffering.

Because Serbians control obstetrics, Albanian women are afraid to go to the hospital to give birth. During 1989, some 11,652 babies were delivered at the university hospital, 93% of them to Albanian mothers. Now only four or five babies are born there each day. Neonatal tetanus has risen as a result of home deliveries under unsanitary conditions and without medical assistance. Vaccination rates have fallen from over 90% to as low as 18% in some counties, and increased lack of access to medical care has meant increasing deaths from tuberculosis, and 20 reported cases of poliomyelitis.



Kosova Surgeon General Dr. Alush A. Gashi

'Educated Albanians are the enemy'

Ethnic cleansing has been achieved in all the institutions in Kosova by dismissal of Albanians, said Dr. Gashi. Intellectuals and scientists are especially targeted. Serb officials have publicly stated, "A good Albanian is an uneducated Albanian. Educated Albanians are the enemy," Dr. Gashi reported. After the shutdown of the Albanian-language schools denied them education for one semester, more than 450,000 Kosovan students are being educated in private homes by voluntary teachers. But teachers still face daily interruption from the Serbian police. Teachers in public high schools have been beaten in classrooms by the Serbian police, in the presence of students. Teachers and students have suffered police beatings in front of the private schools.

Many scientists are leaving the region, Dr. Gashi told his audience. "While I respect the desire of scientists to continue their work in good laboratories outside a place as troubled as Kosova, I believe strongly that scientists should stay in Kosova," he said. "I have more respect for those who are dedicated to face the reality, which means to be ready to give their life for this cause. I do not accuse my academic colleagues who have left Kosova for a better life in the United States. I just do not agree that escaping is the solution. I do not agree with their attitude that they will come back to Kosova when the situation gets better. Who will make Kosova better? Who will make the difference if not the best educated people?"

On Oct. 26, 1990, just after returning from testifying at a hearing of the U.S. Senate, Dr. Gashi was roughed up by police, who broke into his workplace and took him to a detention center. He was released after urgent protest from U.S. officials. Immediately afterward all of his scientific and private files were confiscated and his books removed from the bookstores.