



Women's Commission for
Refugee Women and Children
122 East 42nd Street
New York, NY 10168-1289
tel. 212. 551. 3111 or 3088
fax. 212. 551. 3180
e-mail. wcrwc@intrescom.org
www.intrescom.org/wcrwc.html

An independent organization formed
with the assistance of the International Rescue
Committee to advocate for the solution of
problems affecting refugee women and children.

NEWS BRIEFING

SPEAK TO YOUNG KOSOVARS ABOUT THEIR CONCERNS FOR KOSOVO:

You are invited to join Kosovar adolescent researchers and Jane Lowicki, Senior Coordinator and research coordinator, Children and Adolescents Project, Women's Commission, at a briefing for media on the findings of the new study "Making the Choice for a Better Life, Promoting the Protection and Capacity of Kosovo's Youth." Kosovar youth group leaders from the Kosovar Youth Council, Post-Pessimists and Young Ecologists, as well as rural girls involved in the Kosovar Women's Network campaign for girls' education will also summarize current youth initiatives. All will be available for interview following the briefing.

WHEN: 11:00 AM- 12:30 PM, Wednesday, June 27, 2001

WHERE: Youth Center Prishtinë, Youth and Sport Complex, Boro Ramizi

"Making the Choice for a Better Life" is available on our website:

www.womenscommission.org

For more information contact Jane Lowicki, phone: 377-044-188-624, e-mail JLowicki@aol.com; or Amir Haxhikadrija, phone: 377-044-189-237, e-mail amirish_99@yahoo.com.

Embargoed for Release

Contact: Jane Lowicki 377-044-188-624

Liv Ullmann
Honorary Chair
Kathleen Newland
Chair

Board of Directors
Michele Beasley
Natasha Boissier
Khando T. Chazotsang
Roberta Cohen
Juli Aker Duany
Luly Duke
Lina Fruzzetti
Gail A. Furman
Janet Hanson
Barbara Johnson
Joan Kaplan
Jurate Kazickas
Joan Koenig
Elizabeth Ann Kovacs
Susan Martin
Mary Moglia
Katherine Moseley
Amila Orucevic
Regina Peruggi
Darja D. Pichanick
Patsy Preston
Shannon Salinas
Mary Anne Schwalbe
Pippa Scott
Joyce Sherman
Barbara Smith
Xuan Nguyen Sutter
Nikki Testai
Carmen Valenzuela
Jacqueline Winston

Advisory Council
Joan Bingham
Vera Blinken
Meredith Brokaw
Le Lieu Browne
Ellen Chesler
Sandra Feldman
Joan F. Hamburg
Millie Harmon-Meyers
Sarah Kovner
Jacqueline Leo
Anne Luzzatto
Mary McVechan
Karen Olness, MD
Eden W. Rafshoon
Jane Schaller, MD
Jill Schuker
Gail Sheehy

Mary Diaz
Executive Director
Maha Muna
Deputy Director
Judy Benjamin
Senior Technical Advisor
Ellen Jorgensen
Director of Development
Sandra Krause
Director, Reproductive Health Program
Jane Lowicki
Senior Coordinator, Children & Adolescent Project
Diana Quick
Public Affairs and Communications Coordinator
Wendy Young
Washington Liaison and Staff Attorney

KOSOVO'S YOUTH CRUCIAL FOR FUTURE STABILITY
Security is main concern for youth of all ethnicities; girls' education
is viewed as critical, study shows

Prishtina, Kosovo - June 27, 2001 — Millions of dollars spent reconstructing war-torn Kosovo will have been wasted unless the needs of young Kosovars are urgently addressed, claims a report released today in Kosovo by the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children based on youth-led research. "Making the Choice for a Better Life - Promoting the Protection and Capacity of Kosovo's Youth" concludes the international community is failing to adequately involve Kosovo's young people in decision-making and reconstruction efforts, with serious implications for the future of the region.

"This is a generation which has known nothing but war," said Jane Lowicki, Senior Coordinator of the Women's Commission's Children and Adolescents Project. "The youth of Kosovo are still struggling to recover from conflict, while making difficult decisions about their future and that of their communities. Their issues need to be prioritized at all levels so that a peaceful, more tolerant Kosovo can emerge from today's insecure, militarized society. Education, especially for adolescent girls, and psychosocial and youth leadership activities critically need support, but gains made in these areas are under serious threat."

Adolescent researchers interviewed almost 300 young Kosovars for the report. Despite Kosovo's enduring ethnic divide, their interviews revealed that young people from all ethnic communities share similar hopes and fears. Despite NATO's entry into Kosovo in 1999, adolescents of all ethnicities still cite security as their main concern. All groups say they are experiencing the pain of loss and all express a desire for freedom.

Albanian girls most fear kidnapping, trafficking and sexual abuse and lack access to education opportunities, especially in rural areas, and proposed UNMIK education cuts may soon further diminish these opportunities. Serbs and Egyptians (Hashkalija) living in isolated enclaves report hopelessness, lack of freedom of movement and the prevalence of weapons as their top concerns. Few of those interviewed were prepared to acknowledge the suffering of other ethnic groups. Intolerance, violence and insecurity remain pervasive in their lives.

More than half of Kosovo's nearly 2 million people are under the age of 24. Since the end of the war donors have contributed an estimated \$6 million for youth programs in Kosovo, supporting much-needed youth centers and providing psychological support to thousands of young people. Yet youth education and employment needs have not been adequately integrated into economic recovery planning. And although youth groups have undertaken community projects, including town clean-ups and HIV/AIDS awareness sessions, they have not succeeded in creating an influential, non-political voice for young Kosovars, the report finds.

The adolescent survey reveals that many young people are falling through the cracks, particularly girls who do not go to school or who are survivors of sexual violence, minority youth who are the targets of ethnic violence, and boys (and

girls) involved in criminal activity. Despite these and other critical issues, funding for youth programming is quickly declining.

"The local and international community must address the specific needs of 'at risk' youth, and we must also tap into the constructive capacities of young people to aid their recovery and prevent further conflict. The good work that has been done with and for youth must not be allowed to quickly slip away as Kosovo fades from the radar screens of many decision-makers." said Ms. Lowicki. "The energy, resilience and optimism of young people may ultimately offer one of the brightest glimmers of hope for a more tolerant and peaceful Kosovo."

The Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children is the only organization in the United States dedicated solely to speaking out on behalf of refugee women and children. It provides expertise in the areas of reproductive health, protection and participation, asylum issues and refugee children and adolescents. Currently there are almost 34 million refugees and internally displaced civilians worldwide--80 percent of whom are women and children. About half of all refugees and displaced persons are children, a large portion of whom are adolescents, who despite their needs and capacities, are consistently overlooked in humanitarian programming and peace-building and reconstruction initiatives.

###