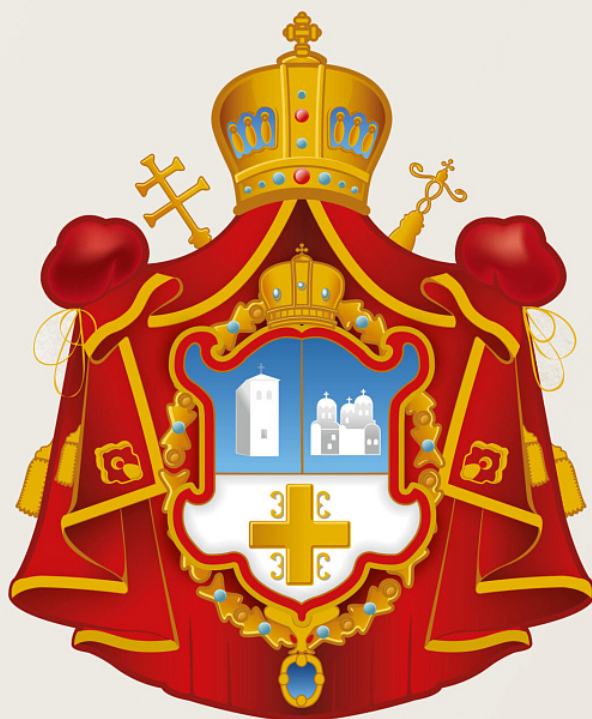




**Synod of the Serbian Church: "The goal of those who desperately seek to drag the Church into tragic conflicts is that the Serbian Church, along with its faithful people, disappear from Kosovo and Metohija."**



**DECR Communication Service, 28.09.2023.**

"With great sadness in our hearts, we pray to the Savior to receive into the Kingdom of Heaven all Serbians and Albanians who lost their lives on 24 September in Banjska, Kosovo and Metohija. We extend our deepest condolences to the families of the victims and beseech the Most Holy Theotokos to provide them with solace. We also call upon the faithful people to pray to the Lord for all those who have suffered, that God may grant peace to everyone, for the future of both Serbians and Albanians in Kosovo and Metohija. We must recognize the simple Gospel truth that we cannot pray to God for peace only for ourselves, but that we must also pray for peace with those with whom we live, with our neighbors." reads the **message of the Holy Synod of Bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church**, published on 27 September 2023.

As previously reported, amid the escalating situation in northern Kosovo, where an armed incident took

place near the village of Banjska, a group of masked armed men **entered** the Banjska monastery and drove armoured vehicles through the locked gates of the monastery. At the time, a group of pilgrims from Novi Sad and a priest were in the monastery, among them were two minors. For security reasons, the monastery brethren and pilgrims locked themselves in the residential building, and the church was also locked. After some time, the armed men left the monastery grounds. The presence of Kosovo police and the EU Rule of Law Mission was observed in front of the monastery entrance and in its courtyard. The pilgrims were later able to return home.

In the published message, the members of the Synod noted with regret that many "both in Priština and around the world, and, even more tragically, in Belgrade, from various ideological backgrounds, using all means, are attempting to portray the Serbian Orthodox Church as a participant, even a perpetrator, in conflicts and tragic events. The goal of those who desperately seek to drag the Church into tragic conflicts is that the Serbian Church, along with its faithful people, disappear from Kosovo and Metohija."

The Serbian archpastors recalled the ten centuries of continuous presence of the Diocese of Raška-Prizren in Kosovo and Metohija, that the Serbian Orthodox Church, along with her clergy, monastics, and faithful people, has persevered there through all times and conditions, despite the harshest persecutions, suffering, and martyrdom of monks, priests, and believers, solely because they were "Orthodox Serbians, faithful to the Cross of Christ and the Kosovo Covenant".

The message of the Synod states that the Serbian Orthodox Church has always advocated and now advocates "for the peaceful resolution of misunderstandings on Kosovo and Metohija through dialogue, aiming for peaceful coexistence of Serbians, Albanians, and all other peoples living in that region."

The members of the Synod also testified their prayerful and any other necessary support to Bishop of Raška and Prizren Teodosije, brother priests, monks and the faithful people.

The published document also states that the Serbian Orthodox Church has repeatedly pointed out the extremely dangerous policy of the authorities in Pristina, whose only goal is the complete expulsion of Serbian residents and the formation of an ethnically Albanian Kosovo. " In pursuit of this objective, numerous attacks have been perpetrated against our holy sites, our people, and even Serbian children. Over recent months, people have been arrested without any evidence or based on fabricated evidence, and Serbian-owned land has been seized", the Synod members noted, expressing the view that Kosovo and Metohija is today a lawless land, where there is no freedom or a minimum of normal life for Serbians.

"We are extending a message of boundless love and paternal care to our brothers and sisters on

Kosovo and Metohija. The Serbian Church, wherever it exists and carries out her pastoral work, will continue to provide abundant aid for you, her long-suffering yet unwavering and proud people on Kosovo and Metohija, wishing to give you comfort, warmth, and hope in these difficult days," the appeal reads.

Stating that for the Serbian Orthodox Church, Kosovo and Metohija is an inseparable part of the State of Serbia, the members of the Holy Synod stressed: "We endorse and encourage the continuation of peaceful dialogue with the aim of achieving peace and resolving vital issues for all who live in the Province".

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