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## HRW urges Bush to press Thaci on human rights

KosovoCompromise Staff

The Human Rights Watch has called on US President George W. Bush to use his Monday's meeting with Kosovo's prime minister to press for improvements to its poor human rights record.

'Kosovo sees the US as a good friend,' said Ben Ward, Europe and Central Asia associate director at Human Rights Watch.

'President Bush should use that influence to press Prime Minister Thaci to reform the criminal justice system, improve the rights of the Roma minority, and investigate the fate of missing Serbs.'

The HRW recalled that the United States government was among the strongest supporters of independence for Kosovo, and moved quickly to recognize it following its declaration of independence in February. Washington pledged \$400 million in assistance to Kosovo at a donors' conference in Brussels on July 11.

« However, Kosovo has a problematic human rights record. Violence, impunity for common and political crimes, intimidation and discrimination are commonplace. If that is to change, Kosovo's government, with the help of the United States and its EU partners, must make human rights a top priority », the HRW said.

It identified the following key deficiencies on human rights:

- Kosovo's broken criminal justice system, which fails victims and frequently leaves political and ethnic violence unpunished;
- The plight of the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities, who are marginalized and vulnerable to violence and discrimination;
- The failure to adequately investigate the fate of several hundred Serbs who went missing after the war, particularly in light of recent credible allegations about the abduction and cross-border transfer of Serbs from Kosovo to Albania; and
- Domestic violence and trafficking of women.

'Kosovo needs to tackle its serious human rights problems urgently,' said Ward. 'If the US makes human rights a priority in its relations with Kosovo, Pristina will be more likely to act.'



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«Kosovo's criminal justice system is a particular concern. Many of Kosovo's ongoing human rights problems, particularly ethnically and politically motivated violence, can be traced back to the failure of the authorities to investigate, arrest, and prosecute those committing the abuses », the HRW said.

A March 2008 Human Rights Watch report, 'Kosovo Criminal Justice Scoreboard' concluded (<http://hrw.org/reports/2008/kosovo0308/>) that there has been little progress in addressing the key shortcomings in the system, including inadequate witness protection and poor cooperation between police and prosecutors. Human Rights Watch's assessment of Kosovo's key human rights problems are set out in 'A Human Rights Agenda for a New Kosovo,' published in February 2008 (<http://hrw.org/backgrounder/2008/kosovo0208>).

The organization has also sent on April 4, 2008 a letter to the prime minister of Kosovo, calling for an investigation into the fate of Serbs missing since 1999, please visit:

<http://hrw.org/english/docs/2008/05/01/serbia18695.htm>