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"U.S. supports organ trafficking probe in Kosovo"

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WASHINGTON -- U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Philip Reeker says the U.S. fully supports the investigation into organ trafficking in Kosovo.



Philip Reeker (Tanjug, file)

He added that it would be long and complex.

During a meeting of the U.S. Congress Helsinki committee that focused on the situation in Albania, he replied to congressmen's questions, one of which referred to the case of the so-called Yellow house, where organs were taken from captive Serbs.

"The U.S. takes seriously all accusations of war crimes and supports in full the investigation into the claims made in the report by Council of Europe Rapporteur Dick Marty," Reeker noted.

"The accusations involve crimes older than a decade, and it is going to be a long and complex inquiry," he pointed out, adding he was pleased that U.S. prosecutor Clint Williamson was leading the probe, since he had experience in that field.

"The investigation has already made good progress, because evidence has been collected," he remarked but refused to predict the outcome.

Reeker commended the authorities in Serbia, Kosovo, Albania and the region on their cooperation regarding the issue.

Carla Del Ponte, a former Hague Tribunal Chief Prosecutor, disclosed the Yellow House case in her book "The Hunt: Me and the War Criminals" in March 2008, only after leaving the office.

She noted that the Hague Tribunal investigators and UNMIK officials obtained the information that in the summer of 1999, Kosovo Albanians transported in trucks over 300 abducted and captured civilians, mainly Serbs and a small number of Roma and Albanians, to Burrel, whom they executed, and sold their organs abroad via the airport in Tirana.

However, all eight witnesses mentioned by Del Ponte went missing and the evidence collected by UN investigators was destroyed in the Hague Tribunal in 2005, as the probe was not launched.

Marty published his report on these crimes in December 2010, placing the blame for these crimes on members of the (Albanian paramilitary forces) Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) and its commanders, including Kosovo's incumbent Prime Minister Hashim Thaci.