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SRSG Statement on Murders of Four Ashkalis

The news of the cold-blooded murder of four Ashkali men who had just returned to their home village of Dosevac/Dashevc, which they had fled during the war, is shocking and beyond comprehension.

Whoever murdered these men, less than 48 hours after their return home, intended to destroy all the progress Kosovo has made in the past year, and particularly in the last few weeks.

Hajzer Ahmeti, Ibush Ahmeti, Istret Bajrami and Agron Mehmeti: These innocents--three heads of families and a 16-year-old boy--had been living as displaced people in Kosovo Polje since they were forced to escape with their fellow Kosovo Albanians during the war, nearly two years ago.

On Monday, UNHCR helped them to return. The men knew their houses had been destroyed. They chose to sleep in a tent. They wanted to get to work, with UNHCR and with the Scottish Charity Kosovo Appeal, who were helping them reconstruct their homes.

These men were the advance party of a group of Ashkali and Kosovo Albanian families who were ready to return, together. They were determined to rebuild their lives and their community.

I understand that these men were welcomed back by their Albanian neighbors. What a tragedy for that community. What a tragedy for Kosovo.

This is a contemptible crime. It is an attack not only on the Ashkali community, but on all of Kosovo.

We will do all we can to find the perpetrators. But the damage which has been done to the seeds of democracy which took root last month may be immeasurable.

My deepest condolences go out to their families. I will join them in mourning their loved ones and this dark, dark moment for Kosovo.

