

UN war crimes prosecutor confirms much-reduced Kosovo death toll

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The United Nations' chief war crimes prosecutor Carla Del Ponte told the UN Security Council on November 10 that international investigators have to date unearthed 2,108 bodies in Kosovo. These were mostly ethnic Albanians, but included members of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA). Del Ponte acknowledged that there were Serbs among the dead and that her office was also looking into possible war crimes committed by members of the KLA. "We have perpetrators that are Muslims and from the KLA, but I don't want to tell you more," she said.

Del Ponte's report is a blow to NATO charges that Serb forces murdered Kosovar Albanians on a scale tantamount to "ethnic genocide". This was the justification used by the US and its NATO allies for last spring's air war against Serbia. At various points during the war, US and NATO officials claimed that anywhere from 100,000 to 500,000 Albanian Kosovars had been killed by the Serbs. When the war ended, NATO and UN officials put forward figures of 10,000 or more civilian fatalities.

Del Ponte admitted that most sites examined by investigators contained relatively small numbers of corpses. "Sometimes the reports of victims buried are not borne out at all," she said. A separate draft report by the US State Department notes that on average, 17 bodies were found at the sites examined.

Del Ponte's report confirms earlier findings by the Texas-based private intelligence organisation, Strafor, which concluded that NATO had dramatically exaggerated the scale of anti-Albanian violence in Kosovo. The figure given by the UN war crimes prosecutor came after five months of excavations at 195 sites, one third of the 529 alleged mass graves. The sites examined included those said to contain the most bodies—4,256, according to earlier claims by NATO

and KLA sources.



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