

In need of prayer

From the Editors in the [May 19, 1999](#) issue

In securing the release of the three American soldiers held in Yugoslavia, Jesse Jackson, Joan Brown Campbell and the other U.S. religious leaders who traveled to Belgrade pulled off a dramatic, unexpected success. On behalf of the soldiers, and in an effort to maintain contact with religious communities in Yugoslavia, the delegation made a risky journey.

One of the chief risks, of course, was that the delegation would be used by Slobodan Milosevic to enhance his own position. That danger still exists insofar as Milosevic's gesture leads people to avert their gaze from the events in Kosovo and from the stories that continue to come out of the refugee camps—stories of brutal murder, rape and forced expulsion of ethnic Albanians by Serb forces in Kosovo. For that reason, we think it's a good idea for the religious delegation to make another trip to the Balkans, this time to visit the refugee camps in Albania and Macedonia. Reportedly, the group has already considered the idea. Such a trip would, as Raymond Helmick, a Roman Catholic member of the delegation, put it, provide some "moral balance."

The refugees' accounts of atrocities leave little doubt about the kind of terror they are fleeing—the terror of being herded onto trains, robbed of money and documents, and faced with execution. "We had only one choice: to leave or be killed," Evren Vrajolli told the *Los Angeles Times*, a tale repeated countless times by other refugees. Many of the uncounted dead, gunned down in Pristina and in villages like Bela Krusa and Krusa Emade, weren't even given that choice. The fact that many adult men are missing from the refugee families is a sign of these gruesome realities.

The State Department, which is trying to document the crimes in Kosovo, released a report on May 10 that summarizes some of the horrors: mass executions took place in at least 70 towns and villages; systematic rape was carried out in the cities of Djakovica and Pec. The number of Kosovar refugees who have crossed into Albania, Macedonia and Montenegro is set at 700,000. Meanwhile, hundreds of thousands of

ethnic Albanians are reportedly huddling in the woods in Kosovo, facing starvation, while NATO wonders how to get food to them.

In Belgrade the religious leaders saw the destruction wrought by NATO bombs. They should visit the deportee camps and hear of the brutalities that prompted NATO's actions. To seek to pray with the perpetrator of crimes is laudable. To pray with those who have suffered from the terror of those crimes is imperative.