

and, albeit more rarely, from the families who called us during 1998 to report the murder or disappearance of a family member, that we learned of the murders, abductions, illegal arrests, forced disappearances and other grave violations of human rights against the Albanians. When Serb civilians were murdered, abducted or forcibly disappeared, or when members of the VJ or MUP were killed, we found the relevant information in reports in the Serb media. Researchers went out from our Priština/Prishtinë office, which was established in 1996. They visited the scenes of the events and took statements from witnesses, if there were any, and from the families of the persons who had lost their lives or been taken away by the Serb police or the KLA. It was not easy at the time to take detailed statements with all the necessary data on victims and events. Albanians lived in constant fear of the Serb police bursting into their homes, whilst the families of murdered or kidnapped Serbs were hard to find because, in the aftermath of an incident, they would usually abandon their homes or places of residence. The main objective was to document allegations of war crimes, keep the public informed and bring pressure to bear on the authorities in Serbia and on the KLA to respect the norms of international humanitarian law. In 2004, the HLC began to set up a database of war crimes and grave human rights violations, which became functional in the first half of 2006. It took several months to enter the existing documentation, which consisted of 2,500 statements by survivors and family members of the victims of murder or forced disappearance. It became evident that important personal details of the victims were missing from the statements, that there was no information on mass graves or exhumations, and little of the forensic documentation or evidence used in trials at the ICTY in the Hague. The HLC then drew up a research plan that would list not only the victims of war crimes, but also members of the VJ, the Serbian MUP, and the KLA who had been killed. Teams of researchers and analysts were formed in Kosovo<sup>2</sup> and Serbia, and they have been working together up to the present time.

The basic method used by the HLC in documenting war crimes and serious violations of human rights has been to take statements from witnesses or family members or persons who have indirect knowledge of the circumstances of the murder, death or forced disappearance. It has been an HLC rule that judgements and other court documents, photographs, autopsy reports, exhumation reports, pictures of monuments, ICRC lists, lists from the UNMIK Office on Missing Persons and Forensics, publications and lists from official Serbian institutions, KFOR, UNMIK, and the KLA be accepted as sufficient evidence that a person lost his or her life or was forcibly disappeared in the war or in connection with the war. When establishing the circumstances in which a person died owing to a violation of international humanitarian law, our rule has been that the allegations must be confirmed by two independent sources or on the basis of a statement by one witness and an official document confirming the victim's identity. These rules have been adhered to when gathering and sorting information, but there have been exceptions arising from specific circumstances. For example, in the cases involving elderly people who remained

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<sup>2</sup> The HLC office in Kosovo became an independent body in April 2011, and is known as the Humanitarian Law Center Kosovo, or the HLC Kosovo.