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Albanian authorities refuse to enforce UN decision to return land to Serb monastery

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The ethnic Albanian authorities at the Decani municipal assembly, in western Kosovo, decided on Wednesday that the municipality takes no steps regarding the enforcement of the decision of UNMIK head Joachim Ruecker on the restitution of land to the mediaeval Serbian Orthodox Monastery of Visoki Decani.

The Decani Municipal Assembly decided at its special session to discontinue all contacts with local UNMIK representatives, who were described as the "main causes of manipulation," Kosovo media reported.

Kosovo media reported that demonstrations against the decision that municipal authorities in Decani return the land which had belonged to the Visoki Decani Monastery until June 1999 were postponed on Wednesday.

Representatives of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Kosovo last weekend rejected the allegations of some media in Pristina that the land around Visoki Decani had been taken from socially owned enterprises and given to the Monastery in 1997, stressing that the municipal administration in Decani has manipulated with the data from the cadaster since 1999.

Sources at the Church told the Serbian-language media in Kosovo that the Serbian government had returned to Kosovo 25 hectares of land, recalling that the land belonged to the Monastery until 1946, when the Communist authorities confiscated it and turned it into socially owned land. These plots were used by socially owned companies until the 1990s.

The source from the Serbian Orthodox Church said that Kosovo Albanians took the cadaster in the Decani municipality in 1999 and that the UNMIK Justice Department and Kosovo Assets Agency in 2001 determined that the municipal cadaster illegally and wilfully changed cadastral data and returned the situation in the monastery assets to the situation before 1997.

The Decani monatory, in the western region of Metohia (Greek for "church land"), is one of the most important jewels of Serbian Orthodox architecture and is under the protection of UNESCO.

Ethnic Albanian extremists attacked the monastery with rocket launchers on five occasions since 1999.