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Serbian Orthodox Church dedicates Easter message to Kosovo

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The Serbian Orthodox Church has dedicated its Easter message to Kosovo, vowing that it could never be taken away from the Serbian people.

In a message read on Orthodox Easter Day in all its temples in Serbia and abroad, the Church said "Kosovo is an integral part of the life of every Christian Orthodox Serb".

"The authors of this historic injustice have inflicted pain and suffering on the Serb nation, but the pain and suffering, in spite of everything, points at the unique message of the suffering and the salvation on Calvary", the message says.

"Kosovo and Metohija is not just a matter of Serbian territory. Above and beyond everything else, it is a question of our spiritual being, because we were born with it, grew with it, lived with it, and matured with it as personalities and as a nation...And no-one has taken it away from us and they can never take it away from us," the Church said.

Serbian President Boris Tadic and its minister for Kosovo Slobodan Samardzic both celebrated Easter in the monastery of Visoki Decani, in western Kosovo's region of Metohija.

"I have come to pay homage to the remains of the Holy King Stefan Decanski, but at the same time to meet with the people who live in these lands in isolation and amid great difficulties," Tadic said, speaking just before the beginning of the Easter Liturgy which was attended by Serbs from enclaves in the southern Serbian province, in addition to the Monastery's brotherhood.

"Serbia must nurture its holy places in Kosovo and Metohija not only because of the feeling of responsibility toward its own culture, identity and tradition, but also because of the obligation toward the World Cultural Heritage to which it is contributing with its monasteries", he said.

The Monastery of Visoki Decani was built between 1327 and 1335, under the patronage of the medieval Serbian monarch Stefan Decanski. The Monastery brotherhood is currently made up of 29 monks and novices.

It has been the scene of four mortar attacks by Kosovo Albanian extremists since 1999 and is now under the protection of UNESCO.

Some 150 Serb churches and monasteries have been destroyed by Kosovo Albanians since 1999.