

The Kosovo Memory Book Database

History

The first database of human rights violations was created in 2004. Over the following two years, the HLC's team input and processed 1,100 statements about human rights violations in Kosovo that occurred prior to the war, from 1992 until 1997, 1,500 witness statements concerning the wars in Croatia and B&H, and some 800 statements about the murders, killings and disappearances in connection with the war in Kosovo, which were given to researchers from the HLC and HLCK by witnesses and victims' relatives.¹ New database software was developed towards the end of 2011, and transfer of the existing data into the new database was completed during the first half of 2012. The majority of the documentation gathered related to human rights violations in Kosovo (perpetrated before, during and after the war). Therefore, although investigations continued into the human losses in Croatia and B&H, two main goals were identified: the continuation of the process of documenting all the victims who died or disappeared in connection with the war in Kosovo, and a long-term goal of publishing the Kosovo Memory Book (KMB).

Towards the beginning of 2013, the KMB team began preparations for the evaluation of the KMB database, scheduled for February of 2014. Over the course of 2013, the KMB team input a total of 11,219 names from the Kosovo Archives registry, into the database (duplicate names were excluded).² A further list of 10,008 victim names compiled by the Kosovo Democratic Alliance (LDK) was received³. Data comparison revealed that the Kosovo Archives list (a.k.a. Osmani's list) **contained 1,189**, and **the LDK's list 860, victim names** not already in the KMB database. With the emergence of data on these new victims, the KMB team expanded its work on documenting existing war victims into inquiries into the status of "potential victims" (reported victims that had not been identified in the course of research).

Revision of Priorities

In March of 2014, at the suggestion of the database evaluation team (composed of Dr. Patrick Ball, an expert in quantitative analysis of data on the state of human rights in armed conflicts, Dr. Jule Krüger, a consultant to the Human Rights Data Analysis Group (HRDAG), and Professor Michael Spagat, an expert on statistical analysis of human losses in armed conflicts), the KMB team revised the project's priorities, establishing document systematization, online publication of the individual registry of human losses and the comparison of the KMB database with other relevant sources as priorities, and postponing the publication of the remaining KMB volumes⁴ until the verification of the status of all "potential victims" could be completed.

Document Standardization Guidelines

¹ The HLCK was registered in October of 2010. Prior to that, from 1996 until 2010, it operated as the Kosovo office of the HLC in charge of conducting field research.

² Published by KA director Jusuf Osmani in the book, "Krimet e Serbisë në Kosovë" 1998–1999 (Serbian crimes in Kosovo, 1998 – 1999).

³ The list compiled by the Kosovo Democratic Alliance - the LDK, "Pasojat e Luftes në Kosovë, 1998–1999" (The consequences of the war in Kosovo, 1998–1999).

⁴ The first volume of the KMB, published by the HLC and HLC Kosovo in September of 2011, contains narratives on 2,046 victims who died or disappeared in 1998 in connection with the war.

For the purpose of systematizing the database, towards the end of May of 2014, the project coordinator established a set of “standardization guidelines”, on the basis of which all of the documents have been classified into **seven groups according to author** (civil society organizations (CSOs) and private persons; judicial institutions; civilian authorities; military and police authorities; inter-state institutions; media and publishers; private companies; political parties) and **30 groups according to type** (witness statements, death certificates, military orders, combat reports, official notes, maps, books, media reports, etc.).

Depending on whether a document was created at the time of the event in question by those present (e.g. witness statements, statements given by victims’ families, etc.) or not (e.g. media reports, victim lists, interpretations, etc.), each document has been classified as a **primary or a secondary source**.

All of the documents have also been classified into **two subgroups** according to the **date of creation** (i.e. documents created prior to 2000 or from 2000 on).

Methodology

The HLC’s and HLCK’s access to empirical records on a number of victims who lost their lives or disappeared in connection with the war, coupled with their motivation to use their everyday work to provide a direct contribution to the process of reconciliation in the Balkans, proved crucial in their choice of research goals: the creation of a reliable and comprehensive database which would include **all of the true, and none but the true war victims**.

Three basic methods of data collection were selected: research based on statements taken from witnesses and victims’ relatives, the processing and analysis of document content, and data verification and validation.

The **list of main terms** was selected in accordance with the provisions of the Geneva Conventions, the practice of the ICTY and results of research in progress; each term is accompanied by its definition and description (armed conflict, international armed conflict, internal armed conflict, post-conflict violence, victim, combatant, civilian, armed civilian, potential victim, and not a war victim).

Statements

Statements are taken by trained research staff on the basis of questionnaires which form part of the Incident Report Form and the Potential Victim Status Verification Report Form.⁵ The person giving the statement affirms, in writing, his or her consent to the use of the data for the purpose of the creation of the KMB..

⁵ The Incident Report Form and the Potential Victim Status Verification Report Form were created by the project coordinator in 1999 and 2012, respectively.

By the end of 2014, the KMB team had taken a total of 12,932 statements about war victims, on the basis of which, the deaths and disappearances of 12,792 victims in connection with the war which occurred between January 1st, 1998 and December 31st, 2000, have been established.

Document processing

As of December 31st, 2014, the KMB database contained a total of **31,600 documents - 14,612 witness statements** about war and potential victims and **16,988 other documents** (including 6,922 victim photographs, 2,056 media pieces, 1,998 commemorative documents and/or photographs of monuments, 1,643 certificates, 1,341 personal documents, 723 court documents and 2,305 other documents containing information about war victims).

On the basis of these **31,600 documents**, the death or disappearance in connection with the war has been established for a total of **13,535 persons** (10,812 ethnic Albanians, 2,197 ethnic Serbs and 526 persons of Roma, Bosniak, Montenegrin and other non-Albanian ethnicities), while no connection to the war could be established for the remaining **4,336** “potential victims”. A significant majority of the victims were civilians - out of a total of 10,317 civilians who lost their lives or went missing in connection with the war between January of 1998 and December of 2000, **8,676 were ethnic Albanians, 1,196 were ethnic Serbs and 445 were persons of Roma and other ethnicities**. The remaining 3,218 military casualties (victims) include 2,131 members of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) and the Armed Forces of the Republic of Kosova (FARK), 1,084 members of the Serbian Ministry of Interior Police (MUP) and the Yugoslav Forces (VJ) and three members of the UN’s Kosovo Force (KFOR). The not war victims category includes 3,180 ethnic Albanians, 923 ethnic Serbs and 233 persons of Roma and other non-Albanian ethnicities⁶

4,838 documents, including 2,136 statements by witnesses/victims’ relatives⁷, concern the period Jan. through Dec. 1998, during which a total **2,156** victims lost their lives or disappeared in connection with the war (1,804 ethnic Albanians, 289 ethnic Serbs and 63 persons of Roma and other non-Albanian ethnicities). The records show that, among the civilian victims, were 1,100 ethnic Albanians, 132 ethnic Serbs and 46 persons of Roma and other ethnicities, and that, among the (878) military victims, there are 703 members of the KLA and 175 members of the Serbian MUP/VJ.

⁶ The “not war victims” category is a separate registry within the database which contains archives pertaining to all reported victims found to be alive or to have died of natural causes and/or under circumstances not related to the war on the basis of field checks/verifications undertaken and information in possession of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the Office of Missing Persons and Forensics (OMPF), as well as victims who remained unidentified after repeated fact-checks. The registry also lists some 2,200 former ethnic Albanian detainees that were transferred to prisons within Serbia prior to the arrival of international forces in Kosovo on June 9, 1999, and whose families, who had no knowledge of their fate, reported their disappearance to the ICRC. According to an ICRC assessment published in 2000, approximately 6,000 persons went missing in Kosovo in connection with the war. By November of 2006, this number had been reduced to 2,150 (after exhumation and identification of human remains from mass graves in Serbia and Kosovo and the release of said ethnic Albanian detainees from Serbian prisons).

⁷ Apart from the 2,163 statements taken from witnesses and victims’ families, these documents include: 1,156 victim photographs, 539 media reports, 361 photographs of memorials/monuments, 56 personal documents, 43 certificates, 149 court documents and 398 other documents.

According to records obtained from 22,014 documents, including 9,592 statements taken from witnesses/victims' families⁸, a total **10,122** victims (8,701 ethnic Albanians, 1,191 ethnic Serbs and 230 persons of Roma and other ethnicities) lost their lives or disappeared in connection with the war between January 1st, 1999 and June 14th, 1999. 7,903 of them are civilian victims - 7,346 ethnic Albanians, 385 ethnic Serbs and 172 persons of Roma and other non-Albanian ethnicities. Out of a total of 2,219 military victims, 1,354 were members of the KLA, while the remaining 865, were members of the Serbian MUP/VJ.

From **March 24th, 1999** until **June 9th, 1999**, a total of **758 persons** were killed by bombs in NATO's air campaign: 488 in Kosovo (249 ethnic Albanians, 202 ethnic Serbs and 37 persons of Roma and other ethnicities), 260 in Serbia and 10 in Montenegro. Among these victims were 453 civilians (220 ethnic Albanians, 205 ethnic Serbs and 28 persons of Roma and other ethnicities) and 305 members of armed groups (276 members of the Serbian MUP/VJ and 29 members of the KLA). These figures have been derived from 1,468 documents and 539 statements taken from witnesses and members of victims' families.⁹

Records contained in 3,558 documents¹⁰ (including 1,487 statements given by witnesses and members of victims' families) confirm that, **from June 14th, 1999 until December 31st, 2000**, a total of **1,257** persons died or went missing in connection with the war. 717 of them were ethnic Serbs, 307 were ethnic Albanians, while the remaining 233 victims were of Roma, Bosniak and other non-Albanian ethnicities.

Database Verification and Validation

Over the summer of 2014, the KMB team has input two major registries of Albanian victims into the database: Josef Martinsen's list¹¹ of 9,491 names of individual victims¹², and a list of 8,911 victim names compiled by the Kosovo Committee for the Protection of Human Rights and Liberties (KCPHRL). The comparison of data revealed that **1,114 victim names from Martinsen's list** and **1,036 names from the KCPHRL's list** did not appear in any of the witness statements given to the HLC and HLCK, nor in any of the other registries of war victims that had been input into the KMB database. The preparation of data for automatic transfer was conducted by the database administrator, while the transfer itself was set up by Abacus, a software company based in Croatia (which developed and maintains the current database software).

⁸ Apart from the 9,592 witness statements, these documents include: 4,997 victim photographs, 1,234 media reports, 1,647 memorials/monuments, 973 personal documents, 1,280 certificates, 513 court documents and 1,795 other documents.

⁹ 758 victims of NATO's air campaign (out of a total 10,122 individuals who died or disappeared in connection with the war between January 1st and June 14th, 1999).

¹⁰ Apart from the 1,487 statements by witnesses and victims' relatives, the documents include: 630 victim photographs, 345 media pieces, 79 photographs of memorials/monuments, 261 personal documents, 273 certificates, 118 court documents and 380 other documents.

¹¹ Josef Martinsen, "What happened in Kosovo, 1998–1999"

¹² Upon review of the original list, it was established that it contained at least 2,111 duplicate names, so only 9,491 names were input into the database.

The KMB database was compared to four major registries of Albanian victims: Osmani's, the LDK's, Martinsen's and the KCPHRL's list. On review, the KMB team determined that these registries listed a total of **3,090** (4,199 before de-duplication) individual victims not already identified in the HLC's field research (i.e. on the basis of statements given to the HLC by witnesses and members of victims' families and the analysis of court and other relevant documents, describing the circumstances of death or disappearance of individual victims).

By the end of 2014, fact-checks in the field had revealed that **581 reported victims were indeed war victims**, while **1,438**¹³ persons reported as victims were, in fact, **not war victims** (488 of them were found to be alive, 151 to have died of natural causes and 184 under circumstances unrelated to the war, while 715 of them had never been heard of in the places of their alleged residence or death/disappearance). Verification of the status of the remaining **1,071 "potential victims"** is still pending.

In 2014 alone,¹⁴ the dossiers of 940 war victims (683 ethnic Albanians, 220 ethnic Serbs and 37 persons of Roma and other ethnicities) were amended to include information about the circumstances of their death or disappearance, as described in 665 witness statements. At the same time, on the basis of 984 status verifications conducted, **434 "potential victims"** (386 ethnic Albanians, 37 ethnic Serbs and 11 persons of Roma and other non-Albanian ethnicities) were found **not** to be actual **war victims**, the names of 391 actual war victims were determined not to have been spelled correctly, while **175 "potential victims"** were found to be actual victims.

The data verification process was shown to have been worthwhile: 581 new war victims were identified, while 1,438 reported victims were found not to be true victims of war.

The Total Number of Potential Victims

Apart from the 1,071 "potential war victims" listed in the four major registries of ethnic Albanian victims [Osmani's, the LDK's, Martinsen's and the KCPHRL's list], the verification process will also include **249** reported victims of Serbian ethnicity mentioned only in third-hand accounts, and **376** (mostly ethnic Albanian) victims listed similarly in media reports/articles or publications by victims' families and their associations, none of which cite the source of the claim.

However, bearing in mind the results of the verifications conducted to date, it would be reasonable to expect only a small portion of the remaining **1,686 "potential victims"** to be transferred into the category of actual war victims.

Draft Narratives about Individual Victims

¹³ Over the course of the comparison process, the verification of the status of "potential victims" was undertaken only for those individuals listed as victims by one of the four registries. With respect to the 4,336 individuals categorized as not war victims, in most cases, their status was determined on the basis of documents furnished by the ICRC and the OMPF.

¹⁴ By December 31st, 2014, the KMB team had input, processed and classified a total of **5,320 documents**, including 665 witness statements about war victims and reports on 984 status verifications undertaken on potential victims. The documents processed mention a total of 5,730 war victims (4,759 ethnic Albanians, 770 ethnic Serbs and 201 persons of Roma and other non-Albanian ethnicities).

In 2014, three KMB researcher-analysts conducted an analysis of statements taken by the HLC from witnesses and members of victims' families and other relevant documents, on the basis of which they wrote working versions of draft narratives about each of a total of 1,914 documented victims who died or disappeared in connection with the war in the municipalities of Glogovac/Gllogovc, Istok/Burim, Kamenica/Kamenice, Kosovo Polje/Fushë Kosova, Kačanik/Kaçanik, Klina/Kline, Mališevo/Malisheva and Uroševac/Ferizaj, as well as the working versions of draft narratives about 51 victims (out of a total of 946 victims) who died or went missing in connection with the war in the municipality of Đakovica/Gjakove.

In October of 2014, the working versions of draft narratives of 152 victims in Kosovo Polje/Fushë Kosova were amended to reflect additional research conducted and the completion of status verification of 15 potential victims in this municipality. The only task yet to be completed with respect to this municipality is for the final version of the narratives to be reviewed by the project coordinator.

With respect to the municipalities of Đakovica/Gjakove, Glogovac/Gllogovc, Gnjilane/Gjilan and Kamenica/Kamenice, additional research and status verification of potential victims is still ongoing.

Online Registry of Human Losses in Connection with the War in Kosovo¹⁵

On December 10th, 2014, on the occasion the International Day of Human Rights, the registry of the killed and the disappeared in connection with the war in Kosovo between January 1st, 1998 and December 31st, 2000 was published online on the KMB webpage. The registry contains the personal records of a total of **13,517 war victims** (first name, father's name, mother's name, last name; date or birth, place of birth, place of residence; date and place of death or disappearance; and, the status of the victim at the time of his/her death or disappearance, i.e. civilian or member of an armed group), and is based on all of the information contained in the KMB database on November 7th, 2014. The missing and the killed include 10,415 ethnic Albanians, 2,197 ethnic Serbs and 528 persons of Roma, Bosniak and other non-Albanian ethnicities. Most of the victims are civilians - 8,661 ethnic Albanians, 1,197 ethnic Serbs and 447 persons of Roma, Bosniak and other non-Albanian ethnicities.

After the publication of the registry, the KMB website comment section received more than 500 messages expressing solidarity with the victims' families and support for the publication of their names online.

Evaluation of the Database of the Kosovo Memory Book

December 10, 2014

An examination of the database, "Evaluation of the Database of the Kosovo Memory Book," was undertaken by Dr Patrick Ball and Dr. Jule Krüger, from the Human Rights Data Analysis Group. Their conclusions and recommendations are given below.

¹⁵ <http://www.kosovskaknjigapamcenja.org/>
<http://www.kosovomemorybook.org/>
<http://www.liberkujtimikosoves.org/>

Conclusions and recommendations

“The most important conclusion from our analysis is that the Kosovo Memory Book database documents all or nearly all the human losses during conflict in Kosovo during the period 1998 - 2000. By “nearly all,” we mean that in our opinion, it is very unlikely that there are more than a few tens of undocumented deaths. This conclusion is based on several analyses and findings, including a comparison with ten other databases in which no new records were found; a statistical analysis in which the KMBD was found to have more records than any other database in every period and for each municipality; and a companion analysis by Professor Michael Spagat which shows that the KMB is consistent with two independent probability-based estimates of the total human losses.

We believe that there is a larger lesson in the final records of ‘potential victims’ in the KMBD. Even with work of dozens of researchers and analysts spanning more than a decade, it is probably impossible to create an exact, precise list which includes only the true war victims, and at the same time all of the true war victims. The stock of social knowledge about the past simply does not extend to every single one of the events in which victims suffered. However, it is indeed possible to get very close to an exact list.

Slight imprecisions in the reporting do not impede our analysis of the larger patterns in the conflict. The KMBD is a rich source for historical memory and other transitional justice reactions, for statistical analysis of the conflict, and most importantly, to be a permanent record of the names and lives of the victims lost in the conflict.

Recommendations

We have a small number of technical recommendations for the HLC and HLC-Kosovo:

- We recommend that KMB staff differentiate dates between missing information and the first day of the month and first month of the year (see Sections [4.7](#) and Section [4.10](#)). Missing days are currently recorded as ‘1,’ and missing months are recorded as ‘1.’ These should have some other value (e.g., -1 or NA).
- Name information should be further standardized, as noted in Section [4.3](#).
- The current ethnicity field should be divided into ethnicity and citizenship, as noted in Section [4.6](#)
- We recommend that the KMB staff reconsider the determination of ‘not war’ victims who have only one source document when a victim was not found alive. Perhaps these victims could be maintained on the potential victim list until more information becomes available that allows staff to confirm or reject the connection with the war in Kosovo.
- Correct information on date of origin, fill in missing information on source language. See Section [5.2](#) for more discussion.

These are relatively minor improvements and standardizations, and they will contribute to improving an already excellent database.

Directions for future research

There are a number of interesting directions for possible future research for this project:

- To systematically research and code the circumstances of the death. The database currently only records the type of violation, i.e., death or disappearance. A future version of the data could provide systematic information on the cause of death, such as the weapon used.
- To find information about the perpetrator, i.e., in terms of the responsible armed formation (see Table 4.4), of each killing would be enormously beneficial for subsequent researchers' use of this data, in particular for transitional justice purposes.
- Another related area would be to systematically document the movement of armed forces and the use of airstrikes in the conflict.
- To group victims into events, linking victims who died and disappeared within the same event, to examine the number of victims per event. The creation of events would transform the database from a list of victims to a narrative of events, a step toward a definitive, comprehensive history of the conflict.
- With a much larger project, to document the non-lethal violations that preceded each lethal violation, including threats, imprisonment, torture, sexual assaults, the destruction of property, and other violence. These violations would need the same details about the date and location of the violence, and the perpetrators. Information about the non-lethal violations is another step toward a comprehensive history of the conflict, and it would enable researchers to understand repertoires and trajectories of violence.

We congratulate the HLC and HLC-Kosovo on an extraordinary and remarkable project. Few conflicts have received the sustained and professional attention that the HLC and HLC-Kosovo have given to the human losses in Kosovo 1998 - 2000. The world benefits from this knowledge. Above all, we acknowledge the victims who will now always be remembered.”

A separate analysis was conducted by Professor Michael Spagat, of Royal Holloway, University of London, titled “A Triumph of Remembering: Kosovo Memory Book.” Professor Spagat’s conclusions are given below.

Conclusion

“The general shape of the KMBD time series would not change substantially even if more evidence becomes available in the future and a number of potential deaths are transferred from the list of potential deaths onto the list of actual deaths. In short, KMBD passes all the tests I subject it to.

Yet the present paper is positioned within a larger picture of quality and consistency, much of which is documented in the Krüger and Ball Report (2014) and displayed in the Humanitarian Law Center and Humanitarian Law Center-Kosovo Database Methodology of the Kosovo Memory Book (2014b). Together these three papers provide ample evidence of the high quality and near comprehensiveness of the KMB database.

It is very unusual for a project documenting war deaths on a case-by-case basis to progress to a point where it captures virtually every single one of them. The KMBD appears to have reached this point while simultaneously providing quite a wide range of accurate information on each victim.

The Kosovo Memory Book is an extraordinary achievement that stands as a monument both to its victims and to the human spirit.”