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**United States
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WASHINGTON DC 20547-0001

4517
Office of the Associate Director
for Information
and
Chief Information Officer



June 10, 1999

MEMORANDUM FOR: MAJOR GENERAL DONALD KERRICK, DEPUTY
ASSISTANT TO THE PRESIDENT FOR NATIONAL
SECURITY AFFAIRS

FROM: JONATHAN SPALTER, *Jon S*
ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR FOR INFORMATION

SUBJECT: KOSOVO REFUGEE INTERNET ASSISTANCE
INITIATIVE

. CC Bosnia
MULTILAT
Pres
FYJ
6/11

Attached is an article from today's New York Times. Not only does it provide a good overview of the public-private Internet Initiative that we launched here in the Information Bureau, it also highlights the significant role public diplomacy can play in such situations. Let me know how we can continue to be of assistance.

I hope all is well!

JUN 11 13:20

Technology | Circuits**The New York Times**
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June 10, 1999

For Kosovo's Scattered Refugees, the Internet Is a Lifeline

By LISA GUERNSEY

FORT DIX, N.J. -- Twice a day for the last week, 52-year-old Ramize Bajrami has walked up the metal steps into the makeshift Internet trailer here, hoping to find news about family members she left behind in Kosovo. She sits down at one of the trailer's 12 computers and begins to scroll through Web sites, her gray hair pulled back in a white kerchief. Her hazel eyes search the screen for names she has written on a crumpled paper she clutches in her hands.

"Every day she comes in here and says to me, 'How can I find my children?' " said Kujtim Latifi, a 17-year-old Albanian **refugee** and computer assistant who speaks enough English to translate for the United States Information Agency staff members in the trailer.

Ms. Bajrami, a **refugee**, has four sons who are fighting for the Kosovo Liberation Army and a son and a daughter who she thinks are still in Kosovo.

She recently heard from her brother that another son and his family are in Macedonia, but she has not been able to get in touch with them.

For now, the Internet is her only hope -- and in that sense, Ms. Bajrami is lucky. She has access to Web sites, to Internet radio broadcasts, to e-mail. Refugees in most other camps around Europe do not yet have Internet trailers like the one here; many are still relying on dribbles of information that come in letters or week-old



Jeff Zelevansky for the New York Times

Ramize Bajrami, left, a Kosovar Albanian **refugee**, worked with a computer specialist at Fort Dix, N.J., to locate relatives.

newspapers.

To change that, the information agency is coordinating the Kosovar **Refugee** Internet Assistance Initiative. The Internet trailer at Fort Dix is the project's first online center. A similar center in Germany just opened this week, said David Zweigel, the agency's overseas technologist. Another center in Germany, two in France and two in Poland are also about to go online, Zweigel said. Getting Internet access to the camps in Albania and Macedonia is trickier, because fewer Internet hubs were already in place, but officials hope to connect a pool of laptops in Macedonia via a satellite link this week and in Albania by mid-July.

If the experience here is any indication, those centers will be packed as soon as they open. Since the Fort Dix trailer opened on May 20, Zweigel said, hundreds of refugees have visited it each day.

On Tuesday, nearly 50 people had crowded into the 40-foot-long trailer. The sounds of multiple radio and video broadcasts -- all in Albanian -- were bouncing off the trailer's walls. In one corner, six gray-haired men bent to the computer, listening. Next to them, Latifi helped Ms. Bajrami find a Web site that might enable her to send an e-mail message that could be delivered to the Macedonian **refugee** camp.

At the other end of the trailer, a handful of teen-age boys sat stone-faced, scrolling through photographs of victims of a massacre that according to international monitors took place in Racak in January. The photos, displayed on an anti-Serb Web site called the Kosova Crisis Center, show slain men sprawled on the ground and a dead baby covered with cuts.

Refugees in camps in Europe and the United States can be registered and located online.

When asked why the boys wanted to look at such horrific pictures, Latifi paused then spoke. "Because they would like to see what the Serbs have done," he said. On Monday, he said, a man who was looking at the pictures "saw his uncle, killed." Then, he said, the man looked away and cried.

Providing open access to information is the U.S.I.A.'s primary mission, said Jonathan Spalter, associate director and chief information officer for the agency.

"Access to objective and reliable information will be key to restoring structures of civil society for these terribly dispersed communities of Kosovars," he said.

Reconnecting family members is also a major part of the project.

On this Tuesday, a 20-year-old **refugee** named Liridon Durigi, whose parents are still in Kosovo, found that a cousin is now in a **refugee** camp in Albania. He found his cousin listed on a Web site called the Family News Network (www.familylinks.icrc.org/), which was opened in mid-May by the International Committee for the Red Cross. Pointing to the name, he asked a nearby computer assistant to help him send an e-mail message.

If the Kosovo peace settlement is actually carried out, reliable connections between people could become even more important, Zweigel added. "People will be able to correspond and say: 'I'm going home. You can come home, too,'" he said.

Until then, many visitors to the Internet trailer are happy to be able to read Albanian Web sites and hear Albanian news broadcasts. "When these people came in and heard the news in their own language, it was amazing," Zweigel said. They had just arrived in the United States, with foreign customs and a foreign language spoken all around them. "It was like they felt that this made them real people again," he said.

More than a dozen companies and foundations are participating in the United States Information Agency project. Nongovernmental organizations and foundations are managing the donations and helping to distribute equipment.

Other groups are directing projects that could tie into the agency's effort, like as a project led by professors and students at the Chicago-Kent College of Law. They have been helping organizations in Macedonia and Albania create a Web-based database of refugees' registration information and information about what they saw in Kosovo.

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(June 8, 1999)

But hurdles abound. The telephone system in northern Albania, for example, is so limited that stringing high-speed Internet lines is very difficult. And often the people that refugees have the least information about -- families hiding in Kosovo, for example -- are the least likely to provide information on the Internet.

Villarrubia Olga, an official for the Central Tracing Agency at the International Committee for the Red Cross, said that people inside Yugoslavia or in Macedonia are unlikely to give information because they fear being discovered by Serb forces. "They are more comfortable" elsewhere in Europe, she said.

Ms. Bajrami, meanwhile, sat in front of a computer here, her eyes

welling up as she wondered aloud why she had not heard from her daughter and son still in Kosovo.

But then her voice strengthened. "Every day," she said, slapping her hands against her lap and looking around her, "I will come until I find them."

Related Sites

These sites are not part of The New York Times on the Web, and The Times has no control over their content or availability.

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