

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE

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NGO decries conditions in UN-supervised psychiatric institutions in Kosovo

Patients in UN supervised psychiatric institutions in Kosovo are "victims of physical violence, rape, sexual exploitation and gross neglect," a nongovernmental organization claimed Wednesday.

Mental Disability Rights International, an advocacy group for the mentally ill, said that patients in Kosovo's main sanitariums were "detained in filthy and degrading conditions and subject to dangerously inadequate psychiatric treatment." Spokesman Farhan Haq in the UN Secretary General's office acknowledged Wednesday there were "serious problems".

The UN mission in Kosovo "is aware of abuses cited in this report," he told AFP.

"There are serious problems related to the treatment and condition of mentally ill people, but the main reason had been the lack of resources. So far the donors' answer has been poor."

MDRI said it had surveyed the psychiatric ward of Pristina University Hospital (75 beds), the Elderly Home (165 beds), and the Shtime Facility (285 beds) over a period of two years.

Eric Rosenthal, director of the rights organization and main author of the study, said at a press conference in New York that the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) responsible for supervising the facilities had been notified of the conditions in June 2001, but that a year later still nothing had been done.

"UNMIK programs in Kosovo do not conform with the UN's own disability rights standards. The lack of protections against physical and sexual abuse constitute inhuman and degrading treatment under international law. It is shameful the UN has done nothing to investigate," Rosenthal said.