

Adventist Church in Serbia requests protection from international community

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Megan Brauner/ANN

Threats were written in graffiti on the Sivac Adventist Church in September. Authorities have done little to dissuade vandals, church leaders say.

Windows were shattered at the Leskovac Adventist Church last month.

Criminals broke windows, scrawled threats on walls and destroyed private property at five Seventh-day Adventist churches in Serbia last month, prompting church leaders in the region to appeal to the international community for help.

The latest acts of violence came after a year of escalating crimes against Adventists in Serbia, according to a statement released by church leaders in the South-East European region.

"We acquainted the ... authorities with these happenings, and because incidents like these are happening repeatedly, we decided that the measures taken are not efficient nor they are providing protection and safety to the church members and assets," president for the Adventist Church in South-East Europe Miodrag Zivanovic said in the appeal sent out Friday.

Zivanovic said the Serbian government has not taken steps to protect the Adventist Church against crime and violence, and local law enforcement has not tried to capture and punish the perpetrators.

"Serbia has been through difficult times for years. Some extremists believe they need a scapegoat, which they find in religious minorities," said John Graz, director for the world church's department of Public Affairs and Religious Liberty. "We are expecting the government of Serbia to respond to these aggressions, [and to] demonstrate to the world that it stands for religious freedom."

Copies of the appeal were sent to the Serbian government, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Council of Europe, the embassies for the United States, Germany and Australia, the Center for Development of Civil Society, and the Adventist world church headquarters.

Vandalism began in January 2008 when churches in the towns of Sivac, Kula and Kragujevac were sprayed with [graffiti threats](#), the appeal said. In October, the windows of the Adventist church in Kragujevac were shattered, followed by breaking and entering at local church headquarters in Belgrade in November. The Belgrade vandals were caught on security camera as they damaged cars in the parking lot.

No arrests have been made at the time of the appeal.

<http://news.adventist.org/data/2008/1228497683/index.html.en?&template=printer.html>