

From the G.C. President

March 10, 1997

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O DAGESTAN TRAGEDY NOT LINKED TO CHURCH: Many have received misinformation linking our church to the March 4 tragedy in Buinaksk in the predominantly Muslim republic of Dagestan. As was reported by the Associated Press (with no mention of our church) and national media, a group of townspeople accused Gadzhimurat Gadzhiyev, 31, and his wife Tatyana, of kidnaping and killing a 12-year-old girl and, after torturing them, executed them in the town's public square without a formal trial. Gadzhimurat and his wife were recent converts and active members of our small 8-member church. The widely distributed and largely unconfirmed information speculated on religious persecution of our church in Dagestan itself, and in the city of Rostov-on-Don (500 miles away) where a series of public evangelistic meetings was to begin last Sunday.

Pastor Lee Huff, ESD president, reported that "as of Sabbath evening, March 8 the situation in Dagestan seemed very calm. Adventists faced no difficulties attending church in Makhachkala, capital of Dagestan, nor did those attending services in the six churches in Rostov-on-Don." Government officials assured division personnel that they knew our church was neither the cause of this tragic incident nor responsible for promulgating misinformation about religious persecution. The local church members are persuaded that Gadzhimurat and Tatyana were not guilty of the crime for which they lost their lives.

Maybe there is a lesson for those of us far from the scene. Rumor, opinion and speculation flashed around the globe on the electronic wings of faxes and E-mail. Some facts which were so embellished and diluted that it complicated the division's efforts. The flood of globally distributed misinformation (to which some Muslims responded electronically) made it evident that the church can be served best, especially in this information-age, by responsibly sharing verified information.

O DRAMA IN EAST AFRICA: Another incident focused attention on relationships between Muslims and Seventh-day Adventists when, due to unnecessary criticism by a Seventh-day Adventist minister in East Africa, the Muslims brutally assaulted our pastor, burned his books and took all the church equipment. Oscar (a former Muslim) visited the area with our Muslim evangelist. They took the Adventist minister to visit the chief where he apologized for his remarks. The Muslims were startled and disarmed by the pastor's humility. It was unprecedented in their previous dealings with Christians. As a result they returned the equipment, offered an apology for their assault on the pastor and offered our members a meal as a sign of fellowship. According to Paul Wangai Jr., M.D., Health director of the Eastern Africa Division, our health message provided common ground with Islam. At the close of the dialogue that followed several Muslims continued studying a series of 20 Bible lessons and last Sabbath 22 former Muslims were baptized—with the blessing of local Muslim leaders! And one of the chief's sons, who was also baptized, donated land for an Adventist House of Prayer.

O ALBANIAN ADVENTISTS SAFE AMID ANARCHY: While southern Albania continues to degenerate into armed anarchy Seventh-day Adventists report they are safe. Recent crises, including the collapse of pyramid schemes and local elections in 1996, have highlighted a political and ideological rift

between the north and south and led to a breakdown of law and order. According to Pekka Tahti, president of the Albanian Mission, and ADRA director Sean Robinson, though traveling is hampered by numerous road blocks there does not seem to be any immediate danger and it is possible to travel between Tirana and Korce, the two cities where most of our members live. The Trans-European Division is constantly monitoring the situation and hope that the current tension will soon diminish and that evangelistic activities can be resumed shortly.

O ONTARIO GOVERNMENT TO CLOSE BRANSON HOSPITAL: The Ontario government's Health Services Restructuring Commission announced that Branson Hospital—the only Adventist hospital in Canada—would close and cease to operate as a public hospital. This decision, from which there is no appeal, was totally unexpected. Previous indications were that the hospital would convert from an acute care to an ambulatory care facility as well as provide urgent care to the community. A nearby hospital will take over management on September 1, 1997. Use of the physical site is uncertain but the US\$2.5 million estimated annual physical plant operating cost must be part of any plan submitted to the government. The hospital and its staff of 1,100 have been serving the North Toronto community for 40 years. The closing may affect area churches and schools for 35 percent of the hospital's staff are church members.

Off the Back Burner

Segment #56: (Note: I didn't skip segment #55—I used it by accident in the December 9, 1996 edition. Sorry.) Ellen White appealed to common sense when ministers began using the unnatural "preaching voice" popular in that era. She urged them to study the "wisest manner" of using their vocal organs "by the exercise of a little common sense." "All that was essential was to study and conscientiously follow a few simple rules. But instead of educating themselves, as they might have done by the exercise of a little common sense, they employed a professor of elocution." (4T:604; & MM:264, 265.)

She expressed concern about impractical education. While she was optimistic about the opportunities available to dedicated young people she was troubled by those "useless creatures, only good to breathe, eat, wear, chat, and talk nonsense ... But few of the youth show real sound judgment and good common sense. They lead a butterfly life with no special object in view" (1T: 394). She urged that manual training should be part of Christian noting it would make students who were preparing for professional careers more fit for their duties. She penned: "An education derived chiefly from books leads to superficial thinking. Practical work encourages close observation and independent thought. Rightly performed, it tends to develop that practical wisdom which we call common sense" (Ed:220).

She also advocated common sense regarding extremes in worship: "It is sometimes more difficult to discipline the singers and keep them in working order, than to improve the habits of praying and exhorting. Many want to do things after their own style; they object to consultation, and are impatient under leadership ... Common sense is an excellent thing in the worship of the Lord" (Ev:505).