

Jubilee 2000: Albanian Mafia Kidnaps Priest for Sheltering Prostitutes

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Priest Combating Prostitution Mafias Is Kidnapped Released After Being Threatened for His Work

LECCE, Italy, FEB. 6, 2001 (Zenit.org).- A priest who has been sheltering young women who escape from prostitution networks was kidnapped and released after being threatened.

Father Cesare Lodeserto, coordinator of the Regina Pacis diocesan center of Lecce, was quoted in a ZENIT story on Sunday about a young Moldavian woman, Anna, who had been exploited by NATO soldiers in Macedonia.

Father Lodeserto was kidnapped the same day the story appeared. He told police that he was taken for a couple of hours at gunpoint by two Albanians and warned about his work. The Albanian mafia has established points of contact with the Italian mafia.

"They caught me by surprise when, as usual, I was walking alone on the breakwater for a moment of recollection," he said Monday, before traveling to Moldova to return Anna to her family.

"They came for me quite in the open," Father Lodeserto said. "One of them spoke perfect Italian. Brandishing a pistol, he told me calmly to follow him to the pine grove." The priest said he was treated "with great respect"; however, once they were hidden by the trees, they aimed the pistol at his face.

"They warned me about the consequences that might ensue from my activity of rescuing young girls from the East, Moldavian girls," the priest said. "They told me about the risk we ran, both I, myself, and the girls in the center. They released me only when they saw the police

from the center who, worried about my absence, were looking for me, calling my name."

When Father Lodeserto returned to the center, the women who were there begged him to continue his work and not be intimidated by the threats. "Obviously, we must continue the effort," Father Lodeserto said.

This was not the first time the priest was threatened. The authorities gave him a police escort after he received similar warnings last spring. His work helped lead to the dismantling of an Albanian network of prostitution.

With Father Lodeserto's testimony, police have a computer picture of the kidnappers.

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<http://www.cin.org/archives/cinjub/200102/0043.html>