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Pravoslavie.ru (24.08.2015) - <http://www.pravoslavie.ru/english/81576.htm> - The church of St. Athanasius in the southern Albanian town of Dhërmi was recently attacked and vandalized two days in a row reports the press office of the Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Albania.

On August 20th, during the festive period celebrating the Dormition of the Theotokos, municipality employees of Himara entered the church of St. Athanasius, removing icons and other sacred items and began to vandalize the building. The destruction took place without the knowledge of the Orthodox community or legal documentation, but carried the approval of local law enforcement.

Once the destruction became known the faithful gathered at the church with their priest to protest and intervene to prevent any further damage to the holy building. The people expressed their indignation at such flagrant acts and boldly declared to defend their church against any such further attacks. They gathered again in the afternoon to protest.

Again on Friday, August 21st a serious act of vandalism took place at the church of St. Athanasius when as-yet unidentified persons driving unmarked cars destroyed the cement floor of the temple. The priest was a witness to the vandalism and was almost seriously injured as the perpetrators fled the scene.

Local Church authorities denounced the unprovoked action of destruction and blatant attempt to increase social conflict. The Orthodox faithful of Dhërmi were shocked by the acts of violence and have called upon the state to prosecute the offenders and intervene to stop any further attacks. The faithful are also outraged by the attitude of the media which is largely attempting to politicize and legitimize the acts of hatred.

The acts of August 20th and 21st violates all possible laws considering that the church property belongs to the Orthodox community, and they especially violate Law no. 10057 / 22.01.2009 / "On Ratification of the Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Albania and the Orthodox Church of Albania" which guarantees the inviolability of places of worship and protects them against the state. The acts betray a profound lack of respect for non-Muslim religious communities and echoes the actions of the atheist Communists who first destroyed the church in 1972. The temple was rebuilt in 1992.

The Orthodox Church of Albania condemns all such actions and calls upon its faithful to remain calm but resolute in defending their church and to pray for the repentance of the perpetrators. The Church has also vowed to rebuild the church of St. Athanasius.
