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Montenegro: Amnesty International urges newest UN member state to improve human rights

On the occasion of the country's admission to the United Nations, Amnesty International is urging the President of the Republic of Montenegro Filip Vujanovic and the Prime Minister Milo Đukanovic to make full use of the newly gained independence to improve human rights.

"As the newest member state of the UN, Montenegro must implement its international obligations to fully uphold and protect the human rights of all people on its territory," Nicola Duckworth, Amnesty International's Europe and Central Asia Programme Director said.

"At the same time, the authorities of Montenegro must address past human rights violations, and comply with the international obligations of a UN member state including seeking out and transferring all those indicted by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia who are believed to be on, or who may travel through, Montenegrin territory -- including Bosnian Serbs Radovan Karadžić and Ratko Mladic."

Amnesty International calls on the Montenegrin President and Prime Minister to take concrete steps on the most pressing human rights challenges facing the country at present, including those stemming from the country's recent past, such as impunity for war crimes and justice for the victims and their families.

There should be no impunity for violations of human rights and international humanitarian law believed to have been carried out by the Montenegrin authorities or Montenegrin units of the Yugoslav army. For example, Amnesty International is concerned about the failure of the authorities to bring to justice those suspected of responsibility for the arrest and subsequent "disappearance" of some 83 Bosnian Muslims, apparently "deported" from Montenegro to the then Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1992.

"Relatives of the 'disappeared' have the right to know the fate and whereabouts of their loved ones. Victims and relatives of the deceased are entitled to prompt justice and unrestricted access to reparations," Nicola Duckworth said.

Amnesty International also calls on the authorities to address continuing impunity for torture and ill-treatment by law enforcement officers. The numerous allegations of police torture and ill-treatment in the Sandžak region, especially in the period 1992-95, illustrate the ongoing impunity for such violations, and the apparent lack of will by the authorities to put a stop to it. There has, to date, been no thorough and impartial investigation into these allegations, and police officers allegedly responsible still serve in the police force in the Sandžak region.

The organization also urges the authorities to implement the recommendations of the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture, who found in its recent report that detainees are at risk of being slapped, punched and kicked at police stations, apparently with the aim of extracting a confession. Some have reportedly even had guns pushed into their mouths in mock executions, while others were beaten of the soles of their feet.

Amnesty International also calls on the Montenegrin authorities to provide continued protection for more than 8,000 refugees, mainly from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia, and over 16,000 internally displaced people from Kosovo in Montenegro. Although agreements have already been made with regard to the resettlement of refugees, the organization calls on the authorities to provide continued protection for those displaced from neighbouring Kosovo, mainly ethnic Serbian or members of the Roma community, at least until the resolution of the final status of Kosovo.

Ethnic Albanians or Bosniaks have not yet been fully granted minority rights. This prevents Bosniaks, for example, from receiving official information or education in their own language. They also continue to be under-represented in state administration and public companies. Amnesty International has expressed particular concern about the Roma (as well as smaller numbers of Ashkalia and Egyptians in Montenegro) who faced an increase in racist attacks during 2005, and continued discrimination in their access to employment, transport and in the right to health and adequate housing.

"The newly acquired independence should be an impetus to the Montenegrin authorities to address consistently and comprehensively all existing human rights problems. Compliance with international obligations will boost Montenegro's standing as a new member-state of the UN and the Council of Europe," Nicola Duckworth said.

Background

Formerly part of the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro, the Republic of Montenegro held a referendum on full independence from the union on 21 May 2006 following the expiry of the minimum three-year period since the establishment of the state union under the Belgrade Agreement. Under an agreement brokered by the European Union, the referendum needed a minimum turnout of 50 per cent of voters, with at least 55 per cent of those voting in favour. Following a turnout of around 86 per cent and a confirmed result of 55.5 per cent in favour of independence, Montenegro declared independence on 3 June 2006.

Montenegro obtained widespread international recognition during the period between 3 June 2006 and admission to the UN as the 192nd member state by a vote of the General Assembly on 28 June 2006. The seat formerly occupied by Serbia and Montenegro will now pass to the Republic of Serbia, which is also now an independent state.

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