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URGENT REFORMS NEEDED IN ROMANIAN PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITALS NEW AMNESTY REPORT RELEASED IN BRUSSELS

(Brussels 4 May, 2004) In a report released in Brussels only days after the EU's historic enlargement, Amnesty International has turned the spotlight on human rights issues in psychiatric hospitals in Romania, which is a candidate for the next wave of EU expansion.

In particular, Amnesty International is calling on the EU to ensure its pre-accession funding to Romania is implemented in a way that guarantees full respect for the rights of people with mental health problems or intellectual disabilities.

Amnesty International's *"Memorandum to the Romanian Government Concerning Inpatient Psychiatric Treatment"*, which is based on field research in Romania, sets out how people in Romanian psychiatric hospitals are suffering a broad range of human rights violations and being held in deplorable conditions.

Amnesty International considers that the recent tragic deaths of 18 patients in the psychiatric hospital in Poiana Mare, reportedly mostly as a result of malnutrition and hypothermia, is not an exception in the Romanian mental health care system.

(The 19-page Memorandum can be downloaded from www.amnesty-eu.org and www.news.amnesty.org at 0301 Brussels time Tuesday 4 May. To receive an embargoed copy of the report, contact the Amnesty International EU Office - details below).

In particular, Amnesty International has concluded that the current practice in Romania of placing people for involuntary psychiatric treatment, or placing people in hospitals on non-medical grounds, amounts to arbitrary detention and denial of fair trial rights.

"Today we appeal to the Romanian government to act with utmost urgency to protect the lives, dignity and well-being of all patients and residents in psychiatric hospitals in the entire country and urge the government to introduce a comprehensive and effective reform of the mental health services," stated Irene Khan, Secretary General of Amnesty International.

"At the same time we call on the European Union to ensure that resources which may be made available to Romania, as an accession state, to improve its mental health care services are used with full respect for the rights of people with mental health problems or intellectual disabilities, including their right to be treated and cared for, as far as possible, in the community in which they live."

With regard to the process initiated by the EU to reduce the number of institutionalized children in Romania, Amnesty International pointed out that the EU has apparently failed to take account of the many young adults from institutions which were closed down, who ended up being inappropriately transferred to psychiatric hospitals where they could languish for the rest of their lives.

In fact, the EU is currently funding a program to integrate into the community people with intellectual disabilities in Romania, who are currently in facilities controlled by the National Authority for People with Handicap. The EU must therefore ensure that all those inappropriately placed in psychiatric hospitals are included in this program of deinstitutionalization so they are not overlooked for a second time.

For further comment/background and interviews:

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