

## **BULGARIA**

### **The reported ill-treatment of Eli Shtastlivova and Albena Todorova by Bulgarian police**

#### **AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL'S CONCERN:**

Amnesty International is concerned that Eli Shtastlivova and Albena Todorova were ill-treated by a police officer at the police station in the town of Peshtera. The two women are of Roma origin and there are indications that the ill-treatment was racially motivated.

Similar incidents of ill-treatment have occurred repeatedly in Bulgaria over the last couple of years and Amnesty International is concerned by what seems to have become a pattern of police violence. The organization is continuing to urge the Bulgarian authorities to take the problem very seriously, and to demonstrate its willingness to do so by initiating impartial and prompt investigations into allegations of ill-treatment, publish the results and bringing to justice those responsible. Furthermore, the authorities should devise and implement effective training for police officers with special attention given to issues like human rights, racial tolerance and peaceful conflict resolution.

#### **BACKGROUND:**

According to information received by Amnesty International, on 26 September 1995 regional police units carried out a raid on a Roma quarter in Peshtera, a small town about 100 kms southeast from the Bulgarian capital Sofia. They were apparently searching for a criminal suspect who was in hiding there. Eye-witnesses reported to a local human rights organization on 4 October that the police barged into three houses belonging to Roma, breaking doors, windows and furniture. One woman said that the policemen violently entered her house and started damaging the furniture, frightening her four-year-old daughter.

Eli Shtastlivova, the owner of a neighbouring house, was not in during the action, but her house was searched nonetheless. When she returned home, she was shocked when she saw that the door was kicked in and the windows of the house were broken. Inside the house the furniture had been smashed about. She was told by her neighbours, whose houses had also been searched, that policemen had broken into her house. Eli Shtastlivova asked her daughter-in-law, Albena Ferdova Todorova, to accompany her to the police station to make a complaint. When they got to the police station they met a policeman in the street whom they asked why their house had been ravaged. The policeman (whose identity is known to Amnesty International) started cursing at them and then kicked Eli Shtastlivova. When Albena Todorova tried to intervene, the policeman

kicked and hit her in the shoulder.

The women then left the police station and went to a first aid post where they received medical treatment. It was established that Eli Shtastlivova had suffered multiple bruising to the thigh. A week after the ill-treatment Serafim Todorov, Eli Shtastlivova's son, went to the District Military Prosecutor in Plovdiv to urge him to thoroughly investigate the ill-treatment of his mother and his wife. Serafim Todorov, a professional boxer who won three world titles for Bulgaria, said in an interview with the Bulgarian daily *24 chasa* that he would not box again for his country as long as those responsible for the ill-treatment had not been brought to justice. He added :

“ The police ill-treated my mother because she is a Rom, but when I won my medals, the Bulgarian anthem was played, not the Roma one”.

Amnesty International is concerned that incidents like these are not investigated properly and impartially by the Bulgarian prosecuting authorities. This concern is reflected in the fact that, in cases brought to Amnesty International's attention, police officers suspected of having ill-treated people in their custody are very rarely brought to justice. Furthermore, no replies have ever been received from the Bulgarian authorities to the many appeals sent to them by the organization expressing this concern. Amnesty International fears that failure of the authorities to take proper action against human rights violations may lead those responsible for them to believe they can act with impunity and will encourage others to follow their example.