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BULGARIA: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL GRAVELY CONCERNED ABOUT PROPOSAL TO LIFT MORATORIUM ON EXECUTIONS.

Amnesty International is gravely concerned that on the same day as the launch of its Bulgaria report at a press conference in Sofia on 6 June 1996, the Minister of the Interior wrote to the National Assembly (the Bulgarian parliament) asking for the lifting of the moratorium on executions imposed in July 1990.

The proposal to lift the moratorium was reportedly justified by the rising crime rate. According to the newly-appointed Minister of the Interior, Nikolay Dobrev, 2,307 people had been killed in the period between 1991 and 1995. In the current year the number killed has reached 88, including five police officers. The Minister of the Interior has reportedly stated: "Under the conditions of transition, the severe punishment of criminals, including their execution, is not a human rights violation".

Previous motions to lift the moratorium on executions apparently enjoyed wide popular support. Although similar debates in the Bulgarian parliament in the past were suspended without a vote, Amnesty International is gravely concerned about this fresh proposal to lift the moratorium, particularly because it has been made by a member of the government which enjoys an absolute majority in the National Assembly.

Before the publication of its report, *Bulgaria: Shootings, deaths in custody, torture and ill-treatment* (AI Index: EUR 15/07/96), Amnesty International's delegates informed the minister about their visit and offered to meet him to discuss the organization's concerns in Bulgaria. However, no reply to this letter was received and the Bulgarian authorities did not contact Amnesty International's delegates during their stay in Sofia.

Referring to Amnesty International's report, an article published in *Kontinent* on 7 June quoted Lieutenant Colonel Ivan Sotirov of the National Police Administration saying that: "Some of the cases are new to us and need to be investigated. In January 1996 the organization submitted to the Military Prosecutor a report on incidents from 1992 to 1995 in which the police had been involved. The Military Prosecutor established that no violations had taken place". (This is apparently a reference to a meeting between an Amnesty International representative and the acting Chief Prosecutor of the Armed Forces, described in the organization's latest report.)

During their three-day visit to Sofia, Amnesty International's representatives met activists of independent human rights organizations as well as a number of victims of human rights violations. The organization is currently investigating a series of new allegations of police beatings and ill-treatment, which further support the findings of its report and underline the urgent need for the implementation of its recommendations. ENDS\