

EXTERNAL

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Amnesty International
International Secretariat
1 Easton Street
London WC1X 8DJ
United Kingdom
Tel: (44) (171) 413 5500
Fax: (44) (171) 956 1157

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GREECE:

ANGELOS CELAL SHOT BY POLICE. A CALL FOR JUSTICE

On 1 April 1998, 29-year-old Rom Angelos Celal and his two friends, Vasilis Rasimoglou and Haris Frangoulis, went by car to a field near Partheni, Thessaloniki. According to Angelos Celal's father-in-law, the three men stopped the car near a barn and started to smoke hashish. By chance, policemen were hidden inside the barn, deployed on an unrelated affair of a stolen car. One of the police officers started to fire at the three men who ran back to their car. As Angelos Celal started to drive the car away, the police officers fired at the vehicle. Angelos Celal was killed on the spot, having received one bullet in the vertebral/spinal column and another one in the head. The two survivors of the shooting claim none of the three men carried a weapon, nor did they know that the police were surveying the area.

Panayiotis Celal, the father of the victim, was informed by the police that his son had been killed after he and two friends had stolen a car (which, according to Panayiotis Celal, belongs in fact to his son-in-law) and fired at police officers, thus obliging them to fire back. However, in the official complaint Panayiotis Celal made to the Prosecutor of the Appeal Court in Thessaloniki, he strongly denies that his son and his friends had any weapon with them and alleges that the bullets shot by the police officers from a distance of between five to eight metres, instead of being aimed at the wheels of the vehicle must have been aimed deliberately at the three men. The autopsy report records "*an injury of a 1.5cm in diameter in the occipital area and a second similar injury in the lumbar area, in the second and third vertebral*" and concludes that "*the body of Angelos Celal (...) presents injuries resulting from shootings with a service gun*", adding that "*.. death resulted from these injuries.*"

Vasilis Rasimoglou alleges that some days after the shooting, when he saw the police officers involved in the town of Chalkidona, he was told "*Wasn't it you, whom we wounded or killed*", which he interpreted as a threat.

On 14 August the Ministry of Public Order wrote to the non-governmental organization Greek Helsinki Monitor which had raised the issue publicly and requested an inquiry into the circumstances of Angelos Celal's death. In this letter, the organization was informed that "an administrative examination had been ordered to establish the circumstances of the death of Angelos Celal and for the attribution of possible responsibilities to the police officers who had

been involved in the case...". The Prosecutor's office also informed Greek Helsinki Monitor that charges had been brought against three police officers for manslaughter, attempted murder, illegal carrying of weapons, illegal use of weapons, attempted bodily injuries and damage to people's property. Since then, the administrative inquiry has yet to be completed and a decision on eventual prosecution of the police officers involved has yet to be taken by the Ministry of Public Order.

Amnesty International urges the Greek authorities to comply with international standards and recommendations in the shooting of Angelos Celal by police, which resulted in death and appears to indicate an unwarranted and excessive use of force. The organization urges that a prompt, thorough and impartial investigation should take place and asks to receive a copy of the report of any such investigation. Amnesty International also urges the Greek authorities to bring to justice any police officer found responsible for the death of Angelos Celal.

Amnesty International also urges that effective steps be taken to ensure that lethal force is not used unless strictly unavoidable in order to protect life. In particular, the training and methods of the police should be reviewed in the light of the UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials which require that: "*[L]aw enforcement officials shall not use firearms against persons except in self-defence or defence of others against the imminent threat of death or serious injury, to prevent the perpetration of a particularly serious crime involving grave threat to life, to arrest a person presenting such a danger and resisting their authority, or to prevent his or her escape, and only when less extreme means are insufficient to achieve these objectives. In any event, intentional lethal use of firearms may only be made when strictly unavoidable in order to protect life.*"

Angelos Celal was married and had a one-year-old child. Amnesty International also calls on the Greek authorities to ensure that Angelos Celal's family receive adequate compensation.

The information in this case comes from a medical autopsy report, an official complaint brought by the father of the victim and interviews with the victim's family which were carried out by the Greek Helsinki Monitor, a local non-governmental organization which collaborates with Amnesty International.