

EXTERNAL

AI Index: EUR 64/16/96

25 November 1996

Further information on UA 183/96 (EUR 64/14/96, 22 July 1996) - Fear for safety

CROATIA Ivan Z _i_ak and other human rights defenders

and: New attack on workers at the Vrhovine advice centre

Late on the evening of 22 November 1996 arsonists attacked the offices of the humanitarian assistance centre in Vrhovine in the former United Nations Protected Area - Sector North. The building was set on fire and fire-fighters were called. Fortunately, the building was empty at the time and no one was hurt.

The centre had been subjected to an arson attempt in July and on the night of 17 October two staff members at the centre were attacked by an intruder. Both attacks are still being investigated by the Croatian authorities. One man was briefly detained by police in connection with the assault in October but he was quickly released by police. He reportedly returned soon after to the centre and again threatened the workers at the centre.

Most of the local population fled or was expelled during the Croatian army offensive to recover the area which was controlled by rebel Serb forces from 1991 until the offensive in August 1995. Few of the local Croatian Serb population remain and most who are still in the area are elderly people who could not or would not flee in 1995. Security in the former United Nations Protected Areas - Sectors South and North - is generally poor and although the situation has improved upon that of 1995, there are still incidents of threats or violence against the local population.

The centre in Vrhovine has been providing humanitarian assistance to the local population: providing legal advice including matters relating to the protection of human rights and assisting and promoting the return of refugees and displaced persons of all nationalities to the area. The centre is run by members of the HOMO non-government organization in Pula and sponsored by the British-based humanitarian organization Oxfam and the European Community Humanitarian Office.

Amnesty International continues to be concerned about attacks on human rights defenders in Croatia. Replies received from the authorities to appeals by members of the Urgent Action Network for investigations into the attack on the house of Ivan Z _i_ak have included an account of the details of the attack and have stated that investigations are in process. However, they have not answered Amnesty International's general concerns about the apparent atmosphere of impunity in which those attacking human rights defenders are able to operate.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express/airmail letters in English, German, Italian, French or your own language:

- noting the arson attack on the humanitarian advice centre in Vrhovine on 22 November 1996 and other attacks on the centre or its staff in July and October;
- noting reports of police investigations into the previous attacks on the advice centre and asking to be advised of the authorities actions in connection with the latest attack;
- expressing concern that humanitarian workers, independent journalists and others involved in the protection of human rights have again been subjected to physical attacks in Croatia;

- calling for the authorities to take effective steps urgently to end the impunity with which these intimidatory acts are committed and to inform you of the action it is taking to solve the problem.

APPEALS TO:

President of the Republic of Croatia

Dr Franjo Tudjman
Predsjednik Republike Hrvatske
Pantov_ak 241
10000 Zagreb, Croatia
Fax: +385 1 4565 256
Telegrams: President Tudjman, Zagreb, Croatia
Salutation: Dear President

Minister of Justice

Miroslav Šeparovi_
Ministar
Ministarstvo za pravosuđe i op_u upravu Republike Hrvatske
Savska cesta 41
10000 Zagreb, Croatia
Fax: +385 1 536 321 / 536 500
Telegrams: Ministar za pravosuđe i op_u upravu, Zagreb, Croatia
Salutation: Dear Minister

Minister of Internal Affairs

Mr Ivan Jarnjak
Ministar
Ministarstvo za unutrašnje poslove Republike Hrvatske
Savska cesta 39
10000 Zagreb, Croatia
Fax: +385 1 443 715
Telegrams: Ministar za unutrašnje poslove, Zagreb, Croatia
Salutation: Dear Minister

COPIES TO: diplomatic representatives of Croatia accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 31 December 1996.