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**Federal Republic of Yugoslavia
Kosovo province**

**Statement by Pierre Sané
Secretary General, Amnesty International
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With every day that passes, greater numbers of civilians are falling victim to displacement, torture, and death in Kosovo province. The Geneva Conventions of 1949 and international human rights law are being blatantly ignored: war crimes are being committed in Kosovo today.

How much more agony are the parties to the conflict prepared to inflict on the civilian communities? When will the Yugoslav authorities and the Kosovo Liberation Army take action on human rights protection? How cheap is life in Kosovo province?

In the past few months, the international media has been showing to the world the rapid deterioration of the security situation in Kosovo, and how even minimal respect for human rights is being withdrawn. The situation, however, is not new. This was a crisis waiting to happen.

For more than a decade, Amnesty International has been warning of the growing human rights crisis in Kosovo province, where ethnic Albanians have been daily victims, particularly through the years when the world's attention was on the conflicts in Croatia and Bosnia. If you look through the materials distributed today, you will find a list of Amnesty International reports on Kosovo going back to at least 1989. Justice has not come for the past victims; action is vital to prevent future victims. This can only be done by securing justice for the victims of today.

Recent Serbian police and military operations, although ostensibly directed at the armed opposition Kosovo Liberation Army, have led to hundreds of civilian deaths, many apparently a result of deliberate or indiscriminate attacks.

Although the vast majority of the victims in Kosovo province have been ethnic Albanians, we should not forget that in the current crisis Serbs are also suffering human rights abuses at the hands of armed ethnic Albanians. A victim is a victim, whatever their ethnicity or nationality.

Effective, independent human rights monitoring is essential in any situation where human rights have been gravely violated and risk being violated further on a massive scale, such as is the case in Kosovo today. Therefore, a properly constituted human rights monitoring mission must be at the centre of the international community's presence on the ground.

By effective monitoring Amnesty International means:

- verification of the situation on the ground, carried out by independent and impartial human rights experts, free of any ongoing attempts to resolve the conflict politically;
- human rights monitors who are adequately resourced and have unhindered access to all parts of the territory, including to remote areas. Their presence in the field should not be *ad hoc* but supported institutionally, and their reporting should be impartial, consistent and regular;
- thorough investigations, aimed at taking remedial action. The human rights monitors should be able to raise human rights concerns with the appropriate authorities and parties until they are satisfactorily resolved. They should also be able to intervene immediately in urgent cases.

The international community must see Kosovo as a human rights crisis: it is an issue of human lives, not simply a threat to regional security. And scrutiny of that human rights crisis is literally vital. Our assessment, based on the very recent presence of our researchers in Kosovo, is that only the high level of scrutiny given by the international media to the current situation has prevented the number of people displaced, "missing", tortured or killed from escalating much farther.

Only when a comprehensive human rights agenda is put in place can Kosovo's crisis begin to be resolved, and until then Kosovo must not be allowed to slip from the headlines.

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