

6 October 2000

AI Index EUR 70/053/2000 - News Service Nr. 191

Federal Republic of Yugoslavia: government must avoid errors of the past

Speaking from the region, Amnesty International Researcher Paul Miller said, "The challenge that faces any new government is to avoid the errors of the past. In this region those errors have bred a climate of fear and insecurity leading to human rights violations on a vast scale. It must set out on the path of full respect for the rights of all its citizens."

The human rights organisation also highlighted the need to bring former President Slobodan Milosevic, (and the four other government officials indicted by the United Nations International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia), to justice. "The new government must uphold its international obligations by arresting and transferring Milosevic and the officials to the custody of the tribunal." Paul Miller said, "At this stage we do not see how a fair and proper trial can be held in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Equally, the international community must not shrug off its own obligations. Amnesties and impunity for crimes against humanity have no place on the negotiating table."

On taking office the president-elect, Vojislav Kostunica, is empowered under Article 96, paragraph 8 of the Federal Constitution to grant a pardon for those convicted under federal legislation. Amnesty International called upon him to demonstrate his and his government's commitment to the cause of justice by effecting the immediate release of all prisoners of conscience and those who are held unlawfully, and to review the cases of those who have suffered unfair political trials. The freeing of such figures as journalist Miroslav Filipovic and human rights activist Flora Brovina would be an unmistakable signal of such a commitment.

Paul Miller added, "the opportunity to create a new political and social climate, marked by the reform of police and security services, respect for the rule of law, the provision of compensation and restitution for the victims and attention to the need of groups such as refugees and displaced persons, lies before Serbia and Yugoslavia. The opportunity must not be missed."

amnesty international briefing

Yugoslavia: a decade of human rights abuses

Updated 6 October 2000

1990: Political and economic crisis deepens. During 1989 Amnesty International (AI) reported that 4,500 people were detained for political reasons - majority of them ethnic Albanians. Of these, 1,700 considered prisoners of conscience, of whom 1,000 were imprisoned for up to 60 days for taking part in strikes. At least 27 killed and over 1,000 arrested during demonstrations in March, November and December. Political prisoners often denied fair trials. On 27 February emergency measures introduced in Kosovo and federal security forces deployed. On April 18 Yugoslavia signed UN Convention against Torture. In December AI received letter from state presidency saying that they were going to bring Yugoslav legislation governing rights of citizens "into accord with international conventions".

1991: Over 1,000 ethnic Albanians imprisoned for going on strike or for peacefully expressing nationalist sentiments. The number of prisoners of conscience then decreased significantly as a result of pardons, early releases and acquittals; by end of the year they numbered 35. At least 30 ethnic Albanian demonstrators killed in clashes with police. Opposition parties established and multi-party elections take place.

Slovenia and Croatia demand end to the Yugoslav Federation. In March Yugoslavia signed Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Six hundred and seventy six striking miners jailed. In May AI delegation met federal and Serbian officials in Belgrade and were informed of forthcoming legislative changes. In November AI sent memo to authorities welcoming reforms but urging release of all political prisoners and end to police brutality against ethnic Albanians.

1992: On 25 June Croatia and Slovenia declare independence. Outbreak of armed conflict in Croatia in July, reports of summary killings of civilians by Serb and Croat paramilitaries. AI raises concerns about human rights abuses during conflict. AI continues to express concerns about police brutality in Kosovo. In March AI wrote to Serbian authorities about reports that police had beaten demonstrators in Belgrade. In March clashes between police and demonstrators protesting against control of Serbian news media by ruling Socialist Party. In September Yugoslavia ratifies UN Convention against Torture.

1993: Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) declared, comprising Republics of Serbia and Montenegro. UNPROFOR declared in conflict zones in Croatia. Conflict in Bosnia - Herzegovina. Ongoing abuses in Kosovo. April 1992 Federal Republic of Yugoslavia abolishes death penalty (to take effect by 1994), but four men sentenced to death in Belgrade. AI continues to urge investigations into abuses by police in Kosovo. In November AI wrote to government expressing concerns about human rights abuses in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

1994: Milosevic dissolves parliament. Elections held in December. Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS) increases representation in parliament but fails to win majority over opposition parties. Economic sanctions (imposed by UN in 1992) strengthened in April. Government refuses to allow UN special rapporteur on Former Yugoslavia to set up an office in Belgrade. AI calls

for government to conduct independent and impartial investigations of all allegations of "disappearance", torture and ill-treatment and called for perpetrators to be brought to justice. AI also called for immediate and unconditional release of all prisoners of conscience and for political prisoners to receive fair trials, or be released. In October an AI delegation was refused permission to visit Yugoslavia. In November, however, it was permitted to view trial of three ethnic Albanians. AI welcomed the establishment of International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY). Ongoing human rights abuses in Kosovo.

1995: Krajina region re-taken by Croat forces - mass exodus of Serbs from region. Many refugees from conflict areas forcibly returned. In November UN suspends sanctions after peace agreement reached in Dayton Ohio. AI called for the immediate and unconditional release of all prisoners of conscience and for political prisoners to receive fair trials, or be released. In June and August AI wrote to the authorities calling for an end to forcible return of refugees and displace; no response was received. Abuses continued in Kosovo.

1996: In November federal elections held and the Socialist Part of Serbia (SPS) win. However, in the same month the opposition coalition Zajedno ('Together') won control of Belgrade and other major towns in a second round of local elections. Authorities attempt to overturn results, demonstrations in Belgrade and other towns. Organisation and Security in Europe (OSCE) investigation concludes that opposition won elections. In August the ICTY begins. Continuing serious human rights abuses in Kosovo. AI appeals to the authorities for independent and impartial investigations of all allegations of "disappearance", torture and ill-treatment and calls for perpetrators to be brought to justice.

1997: Demonstrations by Zajedno continue as authorities refuse to recognise local election results. In July Milosevic stands down as President

of Serbia and is subsequently elected President of FRY; opposition parties had boycotted elections. In October an opponent of Milosovic, Milo Djukanovic, is elected President of Montenegro. Situation in Kosovo continues to deteriorate.

1998: Hundreds of ethnic Albanians and smaller numbers of Serbs are killed in armed conflict in Kosovo. AI report human rights abuses by both sides in conflict. Serbian authorities fail to cooperate with ICTY. Serbian authorities apply pressure on independent media with new media laws. Five newspapers closed down, radio stations closed. Conflict in Kosovo escalates, human rights abuses increase, with summary killings, deaths in custody and the jailing of prisoners of conscience. AI repeatedly appealed to Yugoslav authorities and Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) to respect international humanitarian law and respect human rights in Kosovo. In June Serbian students beaten by police as they protest in Belgrade against a new law which they claim restricts independence of universities. AI calls on authorities to initiate thorough, independent and impartial investigations into allegations of summary killings, "disappearances", acts of forcible displacement, torture and ill-treatment. It also calls for political prisoners to receive fair and prompt trials and that displaced persons be allowed to return to their homes.

1999: Armed conflict between the Serbian and Yugoslav forces, and armed ethnic Albanians of the KLA reaches climax between March and June after NATO intervened with air attacks against the FRY. Gross human rights violations occur on a large scale by Serbian police and paramilitary units; Yugoslav army drives an estimated 850,000 ethnic Albanians out of Kosovo, creating a regional refugee crisis, the largest in Europe since the second world war. Extrajudicial executions, "disappearances", arbitrary detention, torture, ill-treatment, forcible expulsions and the deliberate destruction of homes widespread and systematic. There were also reports of rape or other sexual violence

against ethnic Albanian women. According to independent estimates, at least 500 civilians killed by NATO. On 25 March the federal authorities declared a state of emergency as a result of NATO's attack. Human rights violations occurred throughout the rest of the FRY. Hundreds of anti-government demonstrators beaten by police. Opposition activists, independent journalists and conscientious objectors arrested and imprisoned. KFOR troops in Kosovo arrested Serbs and Roma whom they suspected of involvement in the unlawful killing of ethnic Albanian civilians or other violations of international humanitarian law between March and June. Federal and Serbian governments failed to cooperate with the ICTY. In the aftermath of the Yugoslav withdrawal from Kosovo, opposition party supporters, trade unionists and students demonstrated in towns throughout Serbia calling for the resignation of President Milosevic. The demonstrations became more frequent from September onwards and were often allowed by the authorities. However, on several occasions police used truncheons to break up what started as peaceful demonstrations. AI issued a series of appeals, statements and reports on human rights abuses in Kosovo. Researchers carry out interviews with refugees, other victims and witnesses, lawyers, and representatives of the local and international organisations.

2000: On 5 May violent clashes take place between the authorities and members of the opposition activist group OTPOR (Resistance) in the town of Poñarevac. Miroslav Filipović, journalist for the independent newspaper *Danas*, correspondent for London-based Institute of War and Peace Reporting (IWPR) and Kraljevo correspondent for *Agence France Presse* (AFP), imprisoned on 26 July for seven years on charges of "espionage" and of "spreading false information". AI names him a prisoner of conscience and demands his immediate release. In June, AI report says that NATO forces violated the laws of war leading to cases of unlawful killings of civilians, and that April 1999 bombing of the headquarters of Serbian state radio and television was a war crime. On 5 September

police in Belgrade raid offices of *Otpor* (Resistance) student opposition movement taking away computers, files and campaign material. The raid highlights a pattern of increasing harassment of student activists all over Serbia: repeated arrests, intimidation and physical ill-treatment. On 15 September AI calls for the release of 14 Kosovo Albanians held in a Serbian prison without judicial review. The 14, including a 75-year-old man, had reportedly spent 15 months in prison and as yet no criminal investigation has been initiated. Three days before elections in FRY in late September AI calls for government to stop using intimidation and violence against opposing groups.

\ENDS

public document

For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566

Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW web : <http://www.amnesty.org>