

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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## ***Albania: A death foretold?***

Renato Kalemi, aged 35, who was raised in state orphanages, and reportedly suffered from tuberculosis and heart disease, died on 12 February in Vlora after living for years in conditions of misery. The inadequate and degrading conditions in which Renato Kalemi lived and died are an indictment of the failure of the Albanian state to fulfil its legal obligations to ensure that orphans, when they reach adulthood, have access to adequate housing and to assistance and protection.

Renato Kalemi had been paralyzed since childhood, allegedly as the result of a fall which occurred while he was under state care in an orphanage, and since 1993 had relied on a wheelchair for mobility. For the last 11 years he had been living in squalid conditions in the semi-derelict former residence hall of the Commercial School in Vlora, together with six or seven other adults orphaned in childhood (adult orphans). The group live in great poverty in this building, which is infested with mice, reeks of drains, and has broken windows. The adult orphans who inhabit the building have no individual privacy: they share two rooms between them. Nor do they have any security of tenure. The building is now private property and the owner has reportedly threatened to evict them. The municipal authorities, who are primarily responsible for ensuring alternative adequate accommodation, have repeatedly failed to do so.

Albanian law grants orphans priority in housing and employment on completion of their education at the age of 18, with the aim of protecting them and integrating them into society. The right to adequate housing is also guaranteed in international law, under Article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, ratified by Albania. The Albanian state has blatantly disregarded these obligations, as Amnesty International illustrated in its report issued in November 2007: *Albania: "No place to call home" – Adult orphans and the right to housing* (AI Index: EUR 11/005/2007).

Some 320 other adult orphans are living in similar conditions in "orphan ghettos" in other towns in Albania. They often have few qualifications and are

unemployed or do casual labour for low wages, surviving on minimal state assistance. These adults, who were orphaned as children, and raised in state care, have no possibility of renting or purchasing housing on the open market. The conditions in which they live exacerbate the stigma and social exclusion which is the fate of many orphans, undermining their ability to create warm and stable homes for themselves and for their own children, and rendering them vulnerable to exploitation.

Amnesty International calls on Vlora municipal authorities urgently to fulfil their legal obligation to provide the remaining adult orphans living in the former Commercial School with adequate housing. It also calls on the Albanian central authorities and municipal authorities throughout the country to take steps, as a matter of priority, to realize the right of the most vulnerable members of society, among them adult orphans, to adequate housing. The organization welcomes a project, partly funded by the Council of Europe Development Bank, to create rental social housing in eight municipalities by the end of 2009, but urges the Albanian authorities and their international partners to monitor closely that this housing is built to a good standard and allocated to the most needy.

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