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Albania: Promises to orphans should be a serious commitment

On the eve of National Orphans' Day, (20 May), and with national elections due at the end of June, Amnesty International calls on whichever government is elected to honour promises to improve provision for orphans. These promises must not remain a dead letter.

Amnesty International considers that one of the most immediate and urgent tasks is to ensure that students who have been raised in state orphanages, and who are due shortly to graduate from middle [high] school, are granted their right, under Albanian law, to housing and employment. Amnesty International calls on the Albanian authorities, at central and municipal level, to take prompt and effective action to implement its obligations towards these students. Failure to do so may have dire consequences for these young people on the brink of adult life.

In a few weeks most students in their last year of middle school will say farewell to their classmates, return to their families and start their lives as young adults. However, those students who were raised in state orphanages until the age of 14 years, and have been living for the past four years in the dormitories of their school, may have nowhere to go. Without the support that the authorities are required by law to provide, they are extremely vulnerable. They risk following in the steps of many of their predecessors: stigmatised, socially excluded, living in poverty and sharing rooms in squalid, dilapidated buildings (as illustrated in Amnesty International's report *Albania: 'No place to call home' – adult orphans and the right to housing*, AI Index EUR 11/005/2007).

Amnesty International recalls that both United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) ratified by Albania, and the Albanian constitution, guarantee orphans protection and assistance provided by the state. The organization considers, however, that the protection and assistance offered by the Albanian state to orphan students when they leave orphanages at the age of 14 or 15 years is generally insufficient, often leading to poor grades and to students dropping out of school. Amnesty International calls on the authorities to ensure continuity of protection and assistance – not only material, but also psychological and social - for all these children until they reach adulthood at 18 years, and if necessary, beyond that age.

Amnesty International is concerned that at present, the situation of orphan students deteriorates even further when they complete middle school and face adult life without the prospect of adequate housing or employment. They must be granted their right to adequate housing, as set out in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, to which Albania is a state party, which stipulates that "Disadvantaged groups must be accorded full and sustainable access to adequate housing resources".

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