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Albania: What happened to Remzi Hoxha?

JOINT PRESS RELEASE

Amnesty International, the Albanian Helsinki Committee, the Albanian Human Rights Group, the Albanian Rehabilitation Centre for Trauma and Torture, the Council for Defence of Human Rights and Freedoms (Pristina, Kosovo)

On the anniversary of the "disappearance" of Remzi Hoxha, on 21 October 1995, Amnesty International and Albanian human rights organizations are joining his family in urging the Albanian authorities to clarify his fate.

"The family of Remzi Hoxha has now waited nine long years to learn his fate; it is the duty of the Albanian state to respond to their appeal and to bring those responsible for his 'disappearance' to justice," the organizations said.

Nine years ago Remzi Hoxha, aged 40, was driven away from his workplace in Tirana by men who, according to witnesses, wore civilian clothes in a car which was later reportedly identified as belonging to the National Information Service (SHIK), the secret police. Although his family swiftly reported his "disappearance" and made enquiries with the police and with other authorities, at the time they learned nothing. They have still received no information as to his fate or whereabouts.

"'Disappearances' are violations of international human rights law and standards. They are also acts of extreme cruelty affecting both the 'disappeared' individuals and their families and friends," Amnesty International said.

The organization warned that the continued suffering of the relatives of the "disappeared" -- in being denied the knowledge of the fate of their loved one -- amounts to a violation of their right under Article 3 of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (ECHR) not to be subjected to torture or to inhuman or degrading treatment.

Background

Remzi Hoxha, married with five children, had in 1992 moved to Tirana from Kosovo, where he had been politically active in support of the Albanian nationalist cause. He had previously lived in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

Although an investigation was opened into Remzi Hoxha's "disappearance", it made little or no

progress. In 2003 the investigation was re-opened at the intervention of the Albanian Ombudsperson, to whom Remzi Hoxha's family had appealed. In May 2003 three former SHIK officers were arrested and held for investigation on charges of abduction, hostage-taking and of torture with serious consequences. In court two of them reportedly admitted having taken part in the arrest of Remzi Hoxha and of another man, Ziso Kristopulli, who has alleged that he was severely tortured before being released after five days. However, the two defendants said they had followed orders, and that they had not taken any part in acts of torture and did not know what had happened to Remzi Hoxha. The third defendant, a former chief of Tirana SHIK, reportedly denied all the charges. Arrest warrants have apparently been issued for up to six other SHIK police officers, but it seems that most or all of these have left the country and may be in the UK.

In September 2003 the press reported that the investigation against the three defendants had been completed and the case would be shortly sent to court for trial. However, in November the prosecutor dropped charges against one of the three and in May 2004 the two other defendants were released by court order, reportedly because the court considered that the prosecution had not provided evidence that was strong enough to justify their continued detention.

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>

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