

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## Public Statement

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### **Macedonia: threats to freedom of expression in run-up to elections**

Amnesty International is concerned at threats of criminal sanctions against the editors of independent media by the Ministry of the Interior in the run-up to national elections to be held on Saturday 14 September.

According to a statement of 4 September by the Ministry of the Interior (MVR), Interior Minister Ljube Boshkovski warned on 30 August "ambassadors of international organizations and some ambassadors" to Macedonia that the ministry had information that "certain individuals were preparing a scenario to destroy the reputation of the current government in the pre-election period". The statement went on to warn that if such activity continues, the MVR would initiate criminal proceedings against editors of media outlets responsible.

Amnesty International considers this action to be a threat to freedom of expression and an attempt to 'chill' anti-government voices in the run-up to the elections. The organization would consider anybody arrested and detained for non-violent criticism of the government to be a prisoner of conscience.

The statement also personally attacked Dr. Mirjana Najchevska, chairperson of the Macedonian Helsinki Committee, after the Committee released a press release on 3 September raising doubts as to the political impartiality of the police.

### **Background**

During the run-up to the elections there has been an increase in tension in the country. In a statement on 15 August 2002, on the launch of the report *Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia: Dark Days in Tetovo*, Amnesty International warned that the continued impunity enjoyed by the perpetrators of violations and abuses committed during the conflict in Macedonia in 2001 between security forces and an armed Albanian opposition group, the National Liberation Army (NLA), would perpetuate lack of respect for the rule of law. The organization stated that the spate of assassinations of former NLA members by rival Albanians in the run-up to the elections underscored the need for all parties to respect human rights. Violent incidents have continued. These include the killing of two policemen by gunmen on 26 August in Gostivar, the taking by armed gunmen on 29 August of hostages who were later released after mediation by the international community and the leading Albanian political parties; and a series of bomb and grenade attacks by unknown persons on ethnic Albanian political party buildings.

In January Interior Minister Boshkovski referred on a private television station to the Macedonian Helsinki Committee's chairperson, Mirjana Najchevska, as "state enemy No.1", "anti-Macedonian" and an "attorney for the Albanians" due to the Committee's criticism of human rights violations by the authorities against ethnic Albanians.

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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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