

Greece: Arban Perlala -- Amnesty International writes to Justice Minister

Ahead of the appeal hearing in the case of Arban Perlala on 28 January 2002, Amnesty International has written to Greece's Minister of Justice highlighting the organization's concerns.

Arban Perlala, at the time a high-school student aged 17, was detained after leaving a demonstration in Athens on 15 January 1999. 'Molotovs' had been thrown at a group of police officers, gravely injuring one of them. Arban Perlala, an Albanian who has lived with his family in Greece since the age of 12, was accused of being the attacker, a charge he has consistently denied. He was released on bail. In May 2000, he was sentenced to eight-and-a-half years' imprisonment on charges of setting off an explosive device, disturbing public order and causing grievous bodily harm.

Amnesty International notes that the evidence against Arban Perlala is weak -- his conviction is based on the evidence of one witness -- the police officer who arrested him. Two other police officers involved testified that they had not seen who threw the petrol bomb. Other witnesses at the trial confirmed Arban Perlala's assertion that he was in no way involved in the incident. Video footage apparently shows that the person who threw the petrol bomb was dressed differently. Although convicted by a court majority, three out of the four lay jurors found him not guilty.

Of grave concern to Amnesty International are the allegations, supported by medical evidence, that Arban Perlala was beaten and injured following his arrest.

Amnesty International has noted allegations in the press that prejudice against Albanians played a part in Arban Perlala's treatment in police custody, his prosecution and subsequent conviction. While this may not be the case, the fact that he alone was charged in connection with the demonstration on 15 January 1999, and the apparent weakness of the evidence against him, perhaps inevitably gives rise to such speculations. It is accordingly Amnesty International's earnest hope that the Court of Appeal will show that such fears are groundless by a careful scrutiny of the evidence in this case.

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