

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

PRESS RELEASE

AI Index: EUR 25/014/2002 (Public)
News Service No: 75
30 April 2002

Embargo Date: 30 April 2002 00:01 GMT

Greece: Allegations of reckless use of firearms by border police

Following several incidents in which law enforcement officials on border duties are alleged to have shot and seriously injured unarmed Albanians trying to enter Greece illegally in search of work, Amnesty International has written to Prime Minister Simitis urging him to instruct police, soldiers and coast guards to exercise restraint and limit the use of firearms to situations involving imminent threat of death or serious injury, in line with international standards.

With the approach of summer, the number of Albanians seeking to enter Greece illegally is likely to increase substantially, together with the potential for further incidents to occur.

The letter to the Prime Minister said: "The majority of illegal border-crossers will not be dangerous criminals, but people driven by poverty and unemployment at home to seek work elsewhere, as was the fate in the past of generations of Greek citizens. Greece has indeed the right to control immigration, but Amnesty International would strongly urge you to ensure that law enforcement officials on border duties use firearms only when a suspected offender offers armed resistance or otherwise jeopardizes the lives of others and less extreme measures are not sufficient."

Amnesty International also requested copies of two draft laws on the use of weapons by police and police training which are to be introduced in parliament.

The letter highlights several cases in which firearms may have been used recklessly and unlawfully in border areas. On 21 April 2002 a border guard or soldier is alleged to have shot and wounded 26-year-old Sokol Mulaj as the latter was seeking to flee after being detected near the Greek border.

Six weeks earlier, on 8 March 2002, Ferhat Ceka, aged 67, was apprehended by soldiers as he crossed the border into Greece. He has alleged that they first beat him, and then one soldier ordered him to walk on ahead and shot him in the back. He was taken to hospital in Kastoria, where he underwent an operation for the removal of his kidney and part of his liver, before being returned to Albania for further treatment. The Greek authorities are currently investigating this incident.

Afrim Salla, a boy aged 15, is said to be permanently paralyzed from the waist down. In June 2001 he and some other young men who had entered Greece illegally fled after

being sighted by Greek border guards, who allegedly fired after them, shooting Afrim Salla in the spine. The incident was reportedly investigated and shelved.

Amnesty International also expressed concern about incidents in the Athens area in October and November 2001, in which two men, a Rom and an Albanian citizen, were fatally wounded by police officers who afterwards stated that their guns had fired accidentally. The organization stated that if these explanations were valid they indicated an urgent need for improved professional training of police.

The government should ensure that the use of firearms is in line with international standards and that all incidents in which people are shot and wounded or killed by law enforcement officials are promptly, thoroughly and impartially investigated, and that the findings and methods of such investigations are made public.

Public Document

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