

Federal Republic of Yugoslavia: Kosovo elections: Time to right the wrongs

The new government of Kosovo must commit itself to ending the climate of impunity for abuses of the human rights of minority communities, Amnesty International urged Ibrahim Rugova, leader of the ethnic Albanian LDK (Democratic League of Kosovo) and the new government, following the announcement of a majority for the LDK party in the Kosovo elections.

"The president, government and members of the newly elected and multi-ethnic assembly should use this opportunity to lay the foundation stones for a society which promotes and respects the human rights of all people in Kosovo," Amnesty International urged.

Amnesty International called on the new government to take such measures as are possible within their remit to guarantee the international human rights and "the Rights of Communities and Their Members" set out in the Constitutional Framework for the Provisional Self-Government of Kosovo. It also called upon elected representatives of both ethnic Albanian and Serb communities to ensure that members of their respective communities observe the human rights standards and guarantees set out in the Constitutional Framework.

Members of Serb, Roma and other minority communities have been subject to continuing human rights abuses by members of the ethnic Albanian community -- including abductions, murders and other violent attacks -- since July 1999, when Serb military and paramilitary forces left Kosovo. An estimated 1,300 Serbs and 800 Roma are reported to have been abducted since July 1999. Few perpetrators have been identified or brought to justice. Members of Serb and other minority

communities are also denied freedom of movement – unable to travel outside Serb enclaves without a Kosovo Force (KFOR) escort – and access to basic economic, social and cultural rights.

Amnesty International reminds the UN Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) and KFOR that under UN Security Council Resolution 1244/99, they have responsibilities to protect and promote human rights. Therefore, UNMIK, KFOR and Hans Haekkerup, Special Representative of the UN Secretary General should support and cooperate with the new provisional self-government to ensure the establishment of a rule of law which fully protects the human rights of all people in Kosovo.

In addition, Amnesty International remains concerned about violations of the rights of members of the ethnic Albanian community by UNMIK and KFOR, particularly their violation of international standards guaranteeing the rights of detainees.

Background

Prior to the elections both ethnic Albanians and Serbs were subjected to politically motivated killings and attacks: on 2 September Qerim Ismaili, secretary of the Kosovo Democratic Initiative was killed in Donje Godance, near Stimlje; on 19 October Bekim Kastrati, a journalist for the newspaper Bota Sot, and Besim Dajaku – an LDK bodyguard – were killed by gun-fire when their vehicle was ambushed in Srbica; on 20 October Rados Radonjic, an employee of the Serbian TV station RTS, was seriously wounded at his home in Devet Jugovica, north of Pristina; on 17 November, in Djakovica, a crowd of up to 1,000 ethnic Albanians reportedly stoned members of the Povratak Coalition as they left a church after a political rally. Other attacks or attempts at intimidation took place against individuals, their homes and party offices or election meetings.

Despite calls to boycott the elections, approximately 43% of the potential Serb electorate both in Kosovo and those internally displaced in Serbia took part, with the Serbian Povratak (Return) Coalition guaranteed in the Kosovo Assembly. A further 10 seats are guaranteed for other minorities.

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