

# KOSOVO: A DECADE OF UNHEEDED WARNINGS

## Introduction by Pierre Sané, Secretary General of Amnesty International

The tragedy of Kosovo is a tragedy for the idea of human rights itself. The pattern of gross human rights violations which the world has witnessed there in the early months of 1999 reminds us that the whole concept of inviolable, universal human rights as defined by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights just over fifty years ago remains a very fragile presence in our world. That forcible expulsion, extrajudicial executions and “disappearances” can still occur on such a scale at this century’s end should shock us out of any complacency we may feel about what the international human rights protection system has achieved over the past five decades. Those seemingly endless columns of humanity streaming out of Kosovo - following on from the scores of other forced migrations which have so characterized our age - remind us of how much work remains to be done.

Amnesty International believes that the conflict in Kosovo is one that is rooted in long-term, systematic violations of the human rights of the ethnic Albanian population by the Serbian authorities. Therefore concern for human rights protection and promotion must underpin all efforts towards a settlement of the critical situation in Kosovo. The international community should insist that any agreement between the various parties contains strong provisions that reflect a serious, consistent and long-term commitment to protect and promote human rights effectively in Kosovo, and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) as a whole.

Regretfully, the human tragedy in Kosovo has come as no surprise to Amnesty International. For more than a decade, the organization has been documenting and publicizing its concerns about the systematic violation of human rights in the province. Throughout this period, few of the scores of victims of human rights violations in Kosovo whose names and cases appeared in Amnesty International reports received any form of redress for the crimes which had been committed against them by the Yugoslav police and security forces. In providing the international community with a carefully-researched record of the denial of many of the most fundamental human rights of Kosovo’s ethnic Albanian population since the 1980s, Amnesty International has consistently warned the international community of a human rights disaster waiting to happen.

What follows in these two volumes provides a detailed picture of the decade of torture and ill-treatment, “disappearance” and death in Kosovo which preceded events beginning in March 1999. Amnesty International takes no position on the political issues concerning the status of Kosovo within the FRY or on the military intervention of NATO which began in March. It is clear however that NATO’s intervention is primarily a response to the security situation in the region. So far the intervention has failed to prevent or stop the human suffering. For more than a decade AI has been warning of the growing human rights crisis in Kosovo. To no avail. For the most part the international community did not want to know, did not want to act. It failed to prevent the outbreak of armed conflict in Kosovo which provided the context for further violations of human rights. At the start of the bombing campaign by NATO, Amnesty International emphasized the need for the most rigorous respect for international humanitarian law in Kosovo and the rest of the FRY in a letter sent to NATO, President Slobodan Milošević and the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA). In applying international humanitarian law in the context of Kosovo, Amnesty International has previously reported on a number of breaches of the Geneva Conventions by the KLA in its 1998 publications, and will continue to monitor closely the organization’s activities in relation to its obligations to uphold those principles binding on all parties to a conflict.

It can be argued that the chronic neglect of the warning issued in these reports and the almost complete absence of redress for **all** Kosovo's people has been one of the chief catalysts for the current conflict. If a lasting peace in Kosovo is to be secured, this long chain of impunity must at last be broken. Only by ensuring that **all** those responsible for human rights violations and breaches of international humanitarian law are held accountable for their actions in Kosovo - in the present situation and during the preceding decade - can we hope to see future conflicts averted and a genuine culture of rights take root in the region.

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