

FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF YUGOSLAVIA Ethnic Albanians in Kosovo province

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Extrajudicial executions and other human rights violations have been reported in the Drenica region of Kosovo province during police operations, and there are fears that further similar operations may be planned in the region.

Reports suggest that some ethnic Albanians killed may not have been involved in the fighting, or may have been disarmed beforehand, and there are concerns that the use of force by Serbian security forces has far exceeded that permitted by international standards for law enforcement.

On 5 March 1998 Serbian security forces launched attacks on Donje Prekaze and Lauša villages, near Srbica town in the Drenica region of Kosovo province. Although it is impossible to get independent confirmation due to restrictions on access to the area imposed by the Serbian authorities, the available evidence and testimony from witnesses gives credibility to reports that the Serbian forces committed serious human rights violations during the operations. The operations lasted for two days, although shooting was heard in the area in subsequent days.

On 6 March, in Donje Prekaze, Serbian sources reported that two Serbian police officers had been killed and seven wounded in a police operation they claimed was in response to an early morning ambush in which two policemen were wounded. According to a Serbian press report on 6 March, eight Kosovo Albanians were arrested in Donje Prekaze.

On 7 March the Serbian police Colonel Ljubinko Cveti\_ reported that 26 ethnic Albanians, referred to as "terrorists", had been killed during the police actions in Donje Prekaze. On 9 March, however, ethnic Albanian sources in Srbica reported that more than twice that number of bodies were returned to them by Serbian forces for burial. They reported that among the remains were those of more than 10 women and more than 10 children, some of whom had been burned beyond recognition.

Serbian authorities continue to insist that the operations were to "re-establish communications around Srbica" and that the targets were members of the *Ushtria Çlirimtare e Kosovës* (UÇK), Liberation Army of Kosovo.

Clashes have been fiercest in Donje Prekaze village where Serbian forces reportedly used mortars to shell the village houses. They claimed that the ethnic Albanians were armed with machine guns and hand-held rocket launchers. The focus of these operations seemed to be houses belonging to the extended family of Adem Shaban Jashari, aged 43, an ethnic Albanian. He was tried *in absentia* in 1997 on terrorism charges related to attacks on Serbs resulting in the deaths of four persons and the wounding of 16 others and his alleged membership in the UÇK. Belgrade television broadcast images of buildings that appeared to have been shelled, claiming they were the Jashari family compound; bodies were also reportedly visible strewn on the ground. News programs have also broadcast images of an armoured personnel carrier or tank demolishing a building believed to be one of the Jashari houses.

Serbian authorities in Kosovo said that it had called on civilians to move out of the zone of the operation and that the 30 people who did so were offered

protection by the security forces. However, Albanian sources claim that approximately 50 people were taken from the villages and held until 8 March against their will in a local ammunition factory where Serbian security forces were based.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

In July 1990 the Serbian parliament suspended the Kosovo parliament and government after ethnic Albanian deputies of the Kosovo parliament declared Kosovo independent of the Republic of Serbia. Since then, the majority of ethnic Albanians in Kosovo province (where they constitute over 85 per cent of the population) refuse to recognize Serbia's authority in the province.

The leaders of the main ethnic Albanian parties in Kosovo province have advocated the province's secession by peaceful means only. However, since 1996 violent attacks on Serbian police and Serbs or Albanians associated with the authorities have occurred with increasing frequency. Responsibility for many of these incidents has been claimed by the UÇK.

Police ill-treatment is an everyday occurrence in Kosovo province. Human rights abuses such as torture, extrajudicial executions and unfair trials of political prisoners are occurring regularly.

#### **RECOMMENDED ACTIONS: Please send telegrams/e-mails/faxes/express/airmail letters in English, French, German, Russian or in your own language:**

- noting that the Serbian authorities have repeatedly insisted that the operations in Drenica region are legitimate policing activities but reminding them that in such operations, Serbian security forces are required to abide by international standards such as the United Nations Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms, which prohibit the intentional lethal use of firearms except when strictly unavoidable in order to protect life;
- expressing grave concern that Serbian authorities reported that 26 people were killed in the operations in villages near Srbica, and further concern that ethnic Albanians reported that over twice that number of bodies had been returned to them, including the remains of women and children;
- expressing concern that allegations of severe human rights violations cannot be independently verified or refuted because Serbian authorities continue to deny fully free access to the areas;
- calling on them to respond immediately and positively to the recommendations of the international Contact Group to invite international human rights monitors and forensic experts to Kosovo province, and urge them to allow such independent monitors full unimpeded access;
- calling on them to ensure that all allegations of human rights violations are immediately, thoroughly, impartially and independently investigated and those responsible brought to justice.

#### **APPEALS TO:**

##### **President of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia**

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**Salutation: Dear President**

##### **Minister of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Serbia**

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**COPIES TO:** diplomatic representatives of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia accredited to your country.

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.** Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 21 April 1998.