

EXTERNAL

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EXTRA 97/97

Fear for safety / Fear of ill-treatment

11 July 1997

MACEDONIA, FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF Ethnic Albanian protesters in the town of Gostivar

On 9 July 1997 violent clashes occurred between police and ethnic Albanian demonstrators in the town of Gostivar in the west of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. During the violence two ethnic Albanians were reportedly shot by police and subsequently died as a result of their injuries. More than 100 ethnic Albanian demonstrators were injured. At least five police officers were also injured, some by gunfire. A large number of demonstrators were detained. Some of these have reportedly been charged with firearms offences.

A number of the demonstrators reportedly had firearms and others used Molotov cocktails/petrol bombs, metal bars and other weapons. Following the incidents, the town remains extremely tense.

It is currently impossible to ascertain independently the circumstances in which the demonstrators were killed and others injured by the police. However, in the light of the risk of further clashes Amnesty International considers it vital to remind the authorities of the absolute necessity of respecting international standards such as the United Nations Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials. These basic principles give clear guidance on the degree of force which may be used in particular situations. In particular they state that law enforcement officials should not use firearms except in self-defence or the defence of others against threat of death or serious injury and that lethal force should only be used when strictly unavoidable. The principles also define when other forms of force may be used.

International standards also forbid ill-treatment or torture by police officers in any circumstances.

Amnesty International believes that prompt, thorough, independent and impartial investigations into the deaths of, and injuries to, demonstrators will be vital in helping to prevent further confrontations.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Macedonia has a large ethnic Albanian minority which is largely concentrated in the west of the country and in the capital, Skopje. Ethnic Albanians dispute the official census figures of around 20 per cent, claiming that they number up to 40 per cent of the population. Many ethnic Albanian politicians dispute the legal status of ethnic Albanians in the country, holding that they should be regarded as a constituent nation within the country rather than a national minority.

The clashes in Gostivar arose after the Parliament passed a law on the use of flags. The new law restricted the use of flags of minorities (in this case the Albanian one) to special occasions. After the law was passed earlier this week, police moved quickly to remove Albanian flags which were held to be illegally displayed on the buildings of the municipalities in Gostivar and Tetovo which are both controlled by ethnic Albanian parties.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/faxes/express/airmail letters in English, German, French or your own language:

- noting reports that violent clashes between police and ethnic Albanian demonstrators occurred in Gostivar on 9 July 1997;
- urging that prompt, thorough, independent and impartial inquiries are carried out into the reported deaths and injuries to demonstrators, and asking to be advised of the results of these inquiries;
- calling for police to be reminded, as a matter of urgency, of the need to act according to the United Nations Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials which give strict guidelines as to when force may be used, including that firearms may only be used in self-defence or the defence of others against threat of death or serious injury;
- asking for information about those who have been detained in connection with the incident, any charges which have been brought against them, and urging that all detainees be treated humanely in accordance with international standards.

APPEALS TO:

1) Minister of Foreign Affairs
Dr Ljubomir Fr_kovski
Ministerstvo za odnosi so stranstvo
Maxim Gorki 18 (Dame Gruev 4)
91000 Skopje, FYR Macedonia
Faxes: +389 91 115 790
Telegrams: minister Frckovski, Skopje, FYR Macedonia
Salutation: Dear Minister

2) Minister of Internal Affairs
Tomislav _okrevski
Ministerstvo za vnatrešni raboti
ul. Dim_e Mir_ev bb
91000 Skopje
FYR Macedonia
Telegrams: Cokreski, MVR, Skopje, FYR Macedonia
Salutation: Dear Minister

COPIES TO: diplomatic representatives of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia accredited in your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 11 August 1997.