

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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UA 400/94

Prisoner of conscience/health concern

16 November 1994

ALBANIA

Kurt Kola

Kurt Kola, aged 57, the president of the Association of Former Political Prisoners and Victims of Political Persecution in Albania, was placed under house arrest on 12 August 1994. He was charged under Article 211 of the Criminal Code with obstructing the execution of a court decision. The Association had refused to comply with a court order to end a hunger-strike by some 2,500 former political prisoners demanding financial compensation for their detention under communist rule prior to 1991. On 15 November 1994 it was reported that Kurt Kola had gone on hunger-strike to protest against his detention. He has reportedly spent almost half his life in prison and internal exile under communist rule.

Amnesty International fears that in view of Kurt Kola's past years of extreme deprivation, his health may be at risk. Amnesty International considers him to be a prisoner of conscience and in a letter to President Berisha in September urged his release.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

On 4 August some 2,500 former political prisoners in Albania went on hunger-strike throughout the country after the government rejected their demands for financial compensation (reportedly amounting to millions of dollars) for their past sufferings. The government argued that such sums were way beyond the country's means and said it had provided help to many former political prisoners by facilitating their access to education and work. It promised financial compensation on a lesser scale in the form of bonds to be payable over a period of years. It accused the former political prisoners of being influenced by right-wing political adventurers and said that some of them were "former collaborators of the Albanian secret police". On 8 August a Tirana court declared the hunger-strike illegal (on the basis of legislation dealing with industrial strikes) and demanded its end. On 12 August, after hunger-strikers refused to comply with this order, police in Tirana forcibly ended the hunger-strike and beat hunger-strikers as they dispersed to their homes. There were also reports that fellow hunger-strikers in a number of other towns had been beaten by police. The authorities claimed that in two towns armed groups among the strikers had attacked the police.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express and airmail letters either in English, Italian, French or in your own language:

- expressing concern that Kurt Kola, President of the Association of Former Political Prisoners and Victims of Political Persecution, has been detained in house arrest since 12 August 1994 after the Association failed to comply with a court order to end a protest hunger-strike by many of its members;
- urging his immediate release on the grounds that his continued detention constitutes a violation of the right to freedom of assembly, association and expression as guaranteed by international treaties to which Albania is party;

- expressing concern about possible risks to his health and urging that he be granted any medical treatment that may be necessary.

APPEALS TO

President of Albania
 Dr Sali Berisha
 President i Republikës
 se Shqipërisë
 Tirana
 Albania
Telegrams: President Berisha, Tirana, Albania
Fax: +355 42 33761
Salutation: Dear President

Minister of Justice
 Mr Kudret Çela
 Ministria e Drejtësisë
 Tirana
 The Republic of Albania
Telegrams: Mr Kudret Çela, Ministry of Justice, Tirana, Albania
Fax: +355 42 28 359
Salutation: Dear Minister

Chairman of the Parliamentary Commission for Human Rights
 and Freedoms
 Mr Leka Toto, kryetar
 Komisioni parlamentar për të drejtat dhe lirite të njeriut,
 Kuvendi i popullit, Tirana.
Fax: +355 42 27 949
Salutation: Dear Mr Toto

COPIES TO:

Minister of Foreign Affairs
 Dr Alfred Serreqi
 Minister i Punëve të Jashtme
 Tiranë
Fax: +355 42 32971

The Albanian Helsinki Committee
 Komiteti Shqiptar i Helsinkit
 Qendra Nderkombetare e kultures, Dhoma no.35
 Bulevardi "Deshmoret e kombit"
 Tirana, Albania.

and to diplomatic representatives of Albania accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office if sending appeals after 15 December 1994.