

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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EXTRA 18/92 Legal concern/Health concern

20 February 1992

CROATIA (former constituent republic of Yugoslavia)

Vasilje (Vaso) Kova_

Vaso Kova_, a Serb from the Lika area of Croatia, is a retired Colonel in the Yugoslav National Army, aged 66. On 23 November 1991 he was arrested in his flat by four men in uniform (from the information available to Amnesty International it is not clear whether the uniforms were those of the Croatian Army or Croatian Police). For some six weeks his family were unable to obtain any information from the Croatian authorities about the grounds for his arrest or his whereabouts. They finally learned via the Red Cross that he was being held in the town of Gospi_. He was reportedly in poor health (he suffers from heart disease) and could walk only with difficulty. He was apparently being held in solitary confinement in a cold cell. On 27 January 1992 he was reportedly moved to a prison under military control at Kerestinec, on the outskirts of Zagreb. (There are unconfirmed reports that up to 200 people are detained at Kerestinec). It appears that no charges have been brought against Vaso Kova_, and that neither his lawyer nor members of his family have been permitted to visit him.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Since the outbreak of armed conflict in Croatia in July 1991, thousands of prisoners, both civilians and combatants, have been held without charge by parties to the conflict including the Yugoslav National Army and Serbian paramilitary forces, but also the Croatian authorities. On 10 September 1991, the President of Croatia issued a decree on "internal affairs" in time of war. Under Article 2 of this decree, a person "who disturbs public order" may, on security grounds, be detained without a court warrant "for up to six days or as long as there are reasons for it" [the detention].

Amnesty International has received reports of the arrest and detention, without charge, of a number of Croatian citizens of Serbian ethnic origin. It appears

that their families have frequently been denied information about the place of their detention. There have also been reports that Serbs have been abducted and killed by unknown men in uniforms. On 29 November 1991 the Croatian government announced it had instituted a commission to investigate these killings.

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RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send faxes:

- expressing concern that Vasilje (Vaso) Kova_, aged 66, a retired JNA officer living in Zagreb, has been held without charge since 23 November 1991. State that he reportedly suffers from poor health, and is said to be currently imprisoned in Kerestinec;
- urging his immediate and unconditional release and that he be granted adequate medical care;
- urging the release of all prisoners who have neither used nor advocated violence and are not charged with a recognizably criminal offence.

APPEALS TO:

1) President of the Republic of Croatia:

Dr Franjo Tudjman
Predsjednik Republike Hrvatske
Visoka 2
41000 Zagreb
Croatia

Faxes: + 38 41 444 532

Salutation: Dear President

2) Minister of Defence of the Republic of Croatia:

Mr Gojko Šušak
Ministar za Narodnu Odbranu
Opati_ka 1
41000 Zagreb
Croatia

Faxes: + 38 41 278 483

Salutation: Dear Minister

3) Chairman of the Committee on human rights:

Mr Neven Jurica
Chairman of the Committee on human rights
Parliament of the Republic of Croatia
41000 Zagreb
Croatia

Faxes: + 38 41 451 511

Salutation: Dear Chairman

COPIES TO:

Minister of Justice of the Republic of Croatia:

Mr Bosiljko Mišeti_
Ministar za pravosudje
Savska cesta 41
41000 Zagreb
Croatia

Faxes: + 38 41 278 483

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat,
or your section office, if sending appeals after 30 March 1992.