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BULGARIA: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL CONDEMNS EXCESSIVE USE OF FORCE BY POLICE OFFICERS

In a letter addressed to the Bulgarian Minister of the Interior last week Amnesty International expressed its concern about the increasing number of incidents of excessive use of force by police officers.

"Police appear to have overstepped their bounds in opening fire on suspects in at least five cases recently and have not used their guns only as a last resort," Amnesty International said.

In all of the incidents the victims were not suspected of particularly serious crimes, were unarmed and did not endanger the lives of the police officers involved or anyone else.

- In May two police officers shot 16-year-old Misho Manolov who, together with two other boys, allegedly attempted to break into a kindergarten in Pavlikeni.
- In June police officers shot at 15-year-old Aleksander Petrov, a Rom, who was reportedly seen with two other boys stealing from a food shop in the centre of Kazanluk.
- In July plainclothes police officers shot at three suspects who drove away after attempting to steal a car on Gurko boulevard in Sofia. A fourth suspect, 23-year-old Simeon Nikolov Galchev, who started to run, was shot below the right knee. At the time of the shooting many people were present in the street.
- In September, in the *Sitnyakovo* quarter of Sofia, a police officer fired warning shots at 23-year-old Iliyan Ezekiev who was suspected of stealing a television set. When Iliyan Ezekiev fled into a playground where some children were present, the police officer shot at him, injuring him in the ankle.
- In November 21-year-old Ferhat Alimolla reportedly ran away from police officers who intervened in a bar fight in Kuklen, in the Plovdiv region. He was shot in the hand, as a result of which his thumb was "blown off".

According to Amnesty International the conduct of police officers in these incidents was at variance with the United Nations Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials.

Principle 4 obliges law enforcement officials to apply non-violent means before resorting to the use of force and firearms. They may use force and firearms only if other means remain ineffective or without any promise of achieving the intended result.

Principle 9 permits the use of firearms only "in self-defence or defence of others against the imminent threat of death or serious injury, to prevent the perpetration of a particularly serious crime involving grave threat to life, to arrest a person presenting such a danger and resisting their authority, or to prevent his or her escape, and only when less extreme means are insufficient to achieve these objectives".

Amnesty International has asked the Minister of the Interior whether these incidents have been investigated and if so with what results.

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