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Federal Republic of Yugoslavia: Mr. Milošević, if you have nothing to hide, let the world come and see for itself right now!

International scrutiny of events in Kosovo, as recommended by the international Contact Group, should start with immediate access to affected areas of Kosovo province, Amnesty International urged today.

The Contact Group, originally established for Bosnia-Herzegovina, is comprised of Foreign Ministers from France, Germany, Italy, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

"If President Milošević and the Yugoslav leadership have nothing to hide, and the actions of its forces are legitimate under international human rights law, then there can be no reason to keep the eyes of the world away from Kosovo province," the human rights organization declared.

Amnesty International is however gravely concerned that the denial of access and other threats to journalists, independent human rights monitors and humanitarian agencies means unrestrained police actions involving human rights violations which may include arbitrary killings, torture and arbitrary detention.

Such human rights violations have been reported by ethnic Albanians in the Drenica region of Kosovo province where police operations to hunt out "terrorists" have taken place in the past 10 days. From 28 February to 2 March, at least 24 ethnic Albanians were killed during police operations in Likošane and Ćirez villages -- allegations have been made that some of the victims were deliberately killed after they were disarmed.

On 5 March Serbian security forces launched similar police operations in Donje Prekaze and Lauša villages. They claimed these latter operations were in response to an early morning ambush in which two policemen were wounded.

In Donje Prekaze village, the targets of the Serbian forces (who reportedly deployed artillery) were the homes of the extended family of Adem Shaban Jashari. He is an ethnic Albanian who had been tried *in absentia* in 1997 on terrorism charges related to attacks on Serbs, some fatal, and his alleged membership of the Kosovo Liberation Army (Albanian - *Ushtria Çlirimtare e Kosovës* -- UÇK).

Among those whom ethnic Albanian sources report were killed in Donje Prekaze include 13-year-old Valdet Zënë Jashari, and 16-year-olds Murtez Zymer Jashari and Abdul Jashari. At least two women were also reportedly killed, including Adile Jashari (Adem Shaban Jashari's wife) and the wife of Zënë Jashari. Serbian sources claimed that Adem Shaban Jashari had himself been killed, but ethnic Albanians report that he escaped and is in hiding.

Although on 7 March Serbian police Colonel Ljubinko Cvetiç reported that 26 "terrorists" had been killed during the police actions in Donje Prekaze, yesterday ethnic Albanian sources in

Srbica reported that more than twice that number of bodies were returned to them by Serbian forces for burial. Serbian authorities also continue to insist that the police operations were directed against the UÇK. Albanian sources, however, reported that among the remains handed over in Srbica were those of women and children, some of which had been burned beyond recognition.

Amnesty International fears that some people who were killed may not have been involved in the fighting or may have already been disarmed when they were killed.

"We are concerned that the use of force by Serbian security forces appears to have far exceeded that permitted by international standards for law enforcement, which is how the Serbs continue to classify their actions," Amnesty International said.

Access to the region for journalists, independent monitors, and others has been limited to trips chaperoned by the Serbian authorities. Serbian police have also reportedly prevented ethnic Albanian human rights activists in Srbica from speaking with international organizations.

In another development apparently aimed at thwarting independent scrutiny, on 6 March the Belgrade district attorney took unspecified "measures" against editors of five independent Serbian newspapers and other television stations which had been reporting on events from Kosovo province, stating that they "encouraged the actions of terrorist groups". Amnesty International believes that these measures were clearly intended to threaten independent reporting from Kosovo province, as the editors of the newspapers said that they had only reported factual information and statements credited to other individuals.

The Contact Group yesterday called on the Serbian authorities to invite independent forensic experts to investigate the very serious allegations of extrajudicial killings, and to prosecute anyone found responsible.

"This recommendation needs an immediate positive response from the Serbian side, and should get one if they truly have nothing to hide." Amnesty International said. "It also needs the international community to back it up by identifying qualified forensic experts, and by providing resources so that they can begin work right away."

The organization additionally supported the call for a mission to Kosovo by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, noting that although the post is currently vacant, the Commissioner already has a Special Rapporteur whose mandate includes Kosovo province.

The Contact Group also recommended that the Prosecutor for the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (Tribunal) begin gathering information relating to the violence in Kosovo which may fall within its jurisdiction. The mandate of the Tribunal includes prosecution for crimes against humanity and genocide, which are crimes which can be committed in peacetime as well as armed conflict.

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