

PUBLIC

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UA 82/98

Ill-treatment / Excessive use of force

13 March 1998

FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF YUGOSLAVIA

ethnic Albanians in Kosovo Province

Following reports of large-scale ill-treatment and excessive use of force by police during mass demonstrations in several towns in Kosovo Province on 9 March 1998 there is serious concern that ethnic Albanians and others who participate in forthcoming demonstrations, such as the one planned for 13 March, may also be at risk of police violence.

Tens of thousands of ethnic Albanians demonstrated in the Province's capital and other cities in protest against violent police operations which occurred towards the end of February and on 5 and 6 March resulting in an estimated 80 deaths (see UAs 64/98, EUR 70/10/98, 2 March 1998 and UA 76/98, EUR 70/14/98, 10 March 1998).

Whereas demonstrations in Priština on 8 and 9 March apparently passed without major incidents, ethnic Albanian sources from other towns indicate that Serbian police resorted to excessive force and beat large numbers of demonstrators:

In Istok, northwestern Kosovo, Serbian police officers were reported to have opened fire on ethnic Albanian demonstrators and wounded the following 17 persons: Jahir Arifaj, Hajrush Shoshi, Rrahim Isufaj, Azem Ademaj, Sadri Halit Blakaj, Ahmet Podrimaj, Ryshit Arifaj, Bajram Brahim Mavraj, Nexhmedin Blakaj, Muharrem Rugova, Zenun Sejdi Gjoci, Bajram Mavraj, Ismajl Mavraj, Selman Sylaj, Shaban Blakaj, Mehmet Blakaj and Agron Blakaj. In addition 19 people were reportedly beaten and had to seek medical treatment.

In Pe_, western Kosovo, (where an estimated 70,000 people were known to have participated in the demonstrations) over 100 people were reported to have sought medical attention after having been beaten and otherwise ill-treated by police.

Similar reports have come from other towns, including Klina, De_ani, Mališevo, Kamenica and Lipjan.

Although the Serbian authorities have alleged that not all of the demonstrators behaved in a peaceful way and that some were armed, credible sources report that the majority were peaceful.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In July 1990 the Serbian parliament suspended the Kosovo parliament and government after ethnic Albanian deputies of the Kosovo parliament declared Kosovo independent of the Republic of Serbia. Since then, the majority of ethnic Albanians in Kosovo province (where they constitute over 85 per cent of the population) refuse to recognize Serbia's authority in the province.

The leaders of the main ethnic Albanian parties in Kosovo province have advocated the province's secession by peaceful means only. However, since 1996 violent attacks on Serbian police and Serbs or Albanians associated with the authorities have occurred with increasing frequency. Responsibility for many of these incidents has been claimed by the *Ushtria Çlirimtare e Kosovës* (UÇK) Liberation Army of Kosovo.

Police ill-treatment is an everyday occurrence in Kosovo province. Human rights abuses such as torture, extrajudicial executions and unfair trials of political prisoners are occur regularly.

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

- expressing serious concern at reports that Serbian police ill-treated people and used excessive force during demonstrations by ethnic Albanians in Kosovo Province on 9 March 1998;
- emphasizing that Articles 19 and 21 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (which the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia recognizes as legally binding) guarantee the right to freedom of expression and freedom of peaceful assembly, and urging the authorities to uphold these rights;
- calling on the authorities to desist from further violence against peaceful demonstrators and to ensure that police abide by international standards for law enforcement;
- urging that thorough, impartial and independent investigations be carried out into all reports of ill-treatment and excessive use of force by police on 9 March 1998.

APPEALS TO:

President of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia

Slobodan Milošević
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11070 Beograd, Yugoslavia

Telegrams: Predsednik Srbije, Beograd, Yugoslavia

E-mail: slobodan.milosevic@gov.yu

Faxes: + 381 11 636 775 / 682 167

Salutation: Dear President

Minister of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Serbia

Vlajko Stojiljković
Ministar unutrašnjih poslova Republike Srbije
Kneza Miloša 101, 11000 Beograd, Yugoslavia

Telegrams: Ministar unutrašnjih poslova Srbije, Beograd, Yugoslavia

Faxes: + 381 11 641 867 / 685 073

Salutation: Dear Minister

COPIES TO: diplomatic representatives of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 24 April 1998.