

EXTERNAL

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Fear of ill-treatment /
Possible prisoners of conscience

29 September 1997

FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF YUGOSLAVIA

(Kosovo Province) Avni Istrefaj, Gani Lajni, Besnik Berisha, Abent Mehmedi, Albert Dema, Bekim Olluri, Astrit Haraq, Latif Hajrizi and other ethnic Albanian demonstrators

Amnesty International fears for the safety of ethnic Albanian students and others in Kosovo Province in demonstrations scheduled to begin on 1 October 1997 in a number of towns (see background below). During reportedly peaceful protest marches, held in Priština and other towns in recent days in the run-up to these main demonstrations, police are reported to have beaten some of the thousands of ethnic Albanians participating. Some demonstrators have been arrested.

On 24 September Avni Istrefaj, Gani Lajni, Besnik Berisha and Abent Mehmedi, who took part in protests in Priština, reportedly required medical treatment after being beaten by Serb police during the marches. Albert Dema and Bekim Olluri, students who took part in the protests, also were reportedly beaten by police during the march.

On 25 September Astrit Haraq, the chair of the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) Youth Forum in Djakovica who had been repeatedly ordered to report for questioning in recent days, was reportedly kicked by the chief of police while being questioned in connection with a student march held in Djakovica on 23 September. He was again ordered to report to the police on 26 September, when he was allegedly warned by the police that "in case any incident occurred, he would be the one to suffer the consequences."

In run-up demonstrations in Kosovska Mitrovica on 25 September at around 8pm, police patrolling the town's main square reportedly started to check the identification of the participants and then began to beat people indiscriminately. At least 20 of the protesters were allegedly arrested and taken to the police station. On 27 September police reportedly beat Latif Hajrizi, the director of an ethnic Albanian primary school, and then arrested him and others who had been part of the protests that evening in Kosovska Mitrovica.

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 and a number of "parallel" institutions (in particular in the fields of local government, education and medicine) have been established by ethnic Albanians.

Amnesty International receives almost daily reports of human rights violations against ethnic Albanians in the province.

In 1991, up to 6,000 ethnic Albanian school and university staff were dismissed from their posts for refusing to teach according to curricula laid down by the Serbian authorities, and many were arrested for participating in demonstrations against these closures. Since September 1992, classes with

Albanian as the language of instruction have been closed in almost all secondary schools and at Priština University. During demonstrations in September and October 1992, ethnic Albanian demonstrators again widely protested against the Serbian-only educational system. Two ethnic Albanians were each sentenced to a 60-day prison sentence for organizing these demonstrations and hundreds of ethnic Albanians who took part in them were beaten by police.

On 1 September 1996 an agreement was signed between then-Serbian President Slobodan Milošević and ethnic-Albanian leader Ibrahim Rugova to normalize the schooling system which foresaw the return of ethnic Albanian teachers and staff to schools. However, each side has blamed the other for the lack of progress in implementing this agreement.

To protest the failure to implement the educational agreement, the Independent Union of Albanian Students (Student Union), representing ethnic Albanians, have called peaceful and non-violent demonstrations to commence on 1 October in Priština, Kosovska Mitrovica, Gnjilane, Uruševac, Pe, Djakovica and Prizren. Thousands are expected to take part. On 26 September 1997 Ibrahim Rugova called on the students to cancel the protests, saying that they could exacerbate tensions between the two communities, but the students have refused to cancel them.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/faxes/express/airmail letters in Serbian, English, German or your own language:

- noting that Article 21 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (which the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia recognizes as legally binding) guarantees the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly, and urging the authorities to uphold this right;
- expressing concern that some ethnic Albanian demonstrators and those who are helping organize the protests due to commence 1 October have been detained, possibly solely for exercising their right to freedom of assembly;
- where possible citing the cases mentioned above, express concern that police have beaten, both during the demonstrations and also during questioning, those who have been participating in demonstrations;
- urging the authorities to desist from any further violence against peaceful demonstrators and for measures to be taken to ensure that police officers abide by international standards of law enforcement, in particular those laid down in the United Nations Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials.

APPEALS TO:

Minister of Internal Affairs

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

Telegrams: Ministar unutrašnjih poslova Srbije, Beograd, Yugoslavia

Faxes: +381 11 641 867; +381 11 685 937

Salutation: Dear Minister

President of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia

Slobodan Milošević
 Predsednik SRJ
 Bulevar Lenjina 2
 11070 Beograd, Yugoslavia

Telegrams: Predsednik Srbije, Beograd, Yugoslavia

Faxes: + 381 11 636 775; +381 11 682 167

Salutation: Dear President

COPIES TO: Diplomatic representatives of 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 30 October 1997.