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## **Killings and beatings on the journey to Albania -- Amnesty International reports from the field**

Kosovo refugees interviewed by Amnesty International researchers in the Kukës and Krume regions of northern Albania have given harrowing accounts of killings, beatings and the burning of houses carried out by Serb security forces and paramilitary units.

Most of the interviewed have also suffered robbery and extortion at the hands of those same forces and paramilitary units. Some of the cases reported to the Amnesty International researchers include:

- **A 15-year-old girl reportedly killed and a nine-year-old boy seriously injured when a group of unidentified masked men opened fire on a column of deportees.**

According to Azime Ninaj, the boy's mother, Serbian forces surrounded the village of Malaj -- Albanian Malaj -- which lies west of Prizren very close to the Albanian border, on the afternoon of March 28. They ordered the inhabitants to leave within one hour, and a column left on foot, heading eastwards on the road leading to the village of Planeja, about five kilometres distant.

Members of the Serbian forces were allegedly posted at intervals on both sides of this road. At a location between the two villages a group of about 10 men, masked but in uniform, opened fire on the refugees with automatic weapons. These men were in two unmarked white cars, one on each side of the road. A 15-year-old girl, Nura Ninaj, was reportedly killed in the shooting. Azime Ninaj described seeing her fall, but was unable to see how or where she was hit. Azime's nine-year-old son Burim suffered a bullet wound to his neck

Azime Ninaj, her husband and nephew were able to reach the village of Djonaj (Gjonaj) village where Burim received some medical attention. The family remained there for four days, hiding in the hills surrounding the village before they continued their journey. On the way Azime Ninaj was reportedly forced to pay the sum of 500 Deutschmarks as a "ransom" to a group of Serbs who detained her husband and nephew, threatening to kill them.

The Amnesty International delegates were told by a doctor treating Burim Ninaj in hospital that the nature and size of the bullet wound (which had pierced his throat and fractured his jawbone on exit) appeared consistent with a shot from an automatic weapon.

- **The forcible and brutal expulsion of Djakovica's ethnic Albanian residents.**

The Amnesty International researchers also received a number of disturbing reports from refugees who had come from the town of Djakovica (Gjakovë) or who had passed through it on their flight. Their statements -- highly consistent with those given to foreign reporters and other human rights organizations -- suggest that the forcible expulsion of Djakovica's ethnic Albanian residents was accompanied by greater brutality than in other urban centres.

One of those who had fled, and whose name is known to Amnesty International, described how on 2 April five of his relations were killed in the yard in front of their house by men in black masks armed with knives and automatic weapons. Their bodies were left lying in the street.

Although it has not been possible to confirm his statement independently, Amnesty International is seeking to ascertain further details of this incident and considers it to be consistent with similar reports from the town. The same refugee reported that members of the police and security forces robbed people of money and valuables, accompanied by threats and violence.

Others from the town report having seen bodies, singly or in groups, lying in the streets. In addition, many of those passing through the town after being forced to leave their homes in other areas reported seeing bodies lying in the streets, or in fields along the road leading to Djakovica. Many of them also report being stopped by police in the area and having their identity documents confiscated.

Amnesty International will be issuing further reports in the next few days on the results of its current research on the Kosovo crisis.

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**For further information or to request an interview, please call Amnesty International's press office on +44 171 413 5566 / 5808. ISDN available.**

