

News Service:

096/99

AI INDEX: EUR 70/68/99  
17 May 1999

## **Kosovo refugee crisis: Humanitarian solution or failure to protect?**

### **AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS BRIEFING**

In the current response to the forced mass displacement from Kosovo, a number of key policy issues have been raised by the response of the Macedonian authorities and the international community to this crisis. This response has proved unique in a number of ways:

NATO, a party to the conflict, established and administered refugee camps -- an unprecedented move in the history of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR);  
The creation of a new solution -- "humanitarian evacuation" from Macedonia to other countries -- is also without precedent, as is the "humanitarian transfer programme", under which refugees are to be transported to Albania.

While the challenge to refugee protection posed by the human rights crisis in Kosovo is undeniable, the response to it raises a number of concerns which Amnesty International has outlined in a new document -- *The Protection of Kosovo Albanian Refugees in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia* -- to be launched at a press briefing on:

**Wednesday 19 May at 10:30 am**  
**International Secretariat's Conference Room**  
**Amnesty International**  
**1 Easton Street, London WC1X 8DJ**  
**(off Rosebery Avenue)**  
**Please confirm attendance by phoning**  
**Soraya Bermejo, Press Officer, on 0171 413 5562**

Leanne MacMillan and Saul Takahashi, Amnesty International's experts on refugee issues, will brief journalists on:

Macedonia's failure to fulfil its obligations under international refugee law -- by clearly connecting the opening of its border to the progress of the evacuation;

the intimidation of refugees by the Macedonian police -- verbal and physical abuse;

how refugees are not being given an appropriate legal status and information of it before evacuation, to enable them to make informed choices on if they wish to be evacuated;

how the rush of the international community to evacuate refugees as soon as possible tacitly accepts Macedonia's position;

- the significant questions raised by NATO's role in the protection of refugees from Kosovo about the non-political nature of refugee protection.

During the briefing, a member of Amnesty International's delegation will phone in from the field.  
ENDS.../