

JOINT STATEMENT

For further information contact:

Council for the Defence of Human Rights and Freedoms, Pristina

Contact: Behxhet Shala, +381-38-40990

Humanitarian Law Centre, Belgrade and Kosovo

Contacts: Mustafa Radoniqi, Pec, Ariana Zherka, Pristina (+381-63-210534)

**Teki Bokshi, Prizren, and Natasha Kandic, Belgrade (+38111-4443944 or
38163-210535)**

Kosovo Helsinki Committee, Pristina

Contact: Gazmend Pula, +381-38-26153

Society for Political Prisoners, Pristina

Contact: Berat Luzha, +41-79-929-01253

Amnesty International, London

Contact: Paul Miller, +44-374-114-767 (mobile phone)

Human Rights Watch, New York

Contact: Fred Abrahams, +3275-528-890

News Service 149/99

EMBARGOED FOR TRANSMISSION -- 05.00 HRS GMT 6 AUGUST 1999

AI INDEX: EUR 70/105/99

Human rights groups demand information on thousands of detainees and missing persons from Kosovo -- International Community urged to press issue

Pristina, 6 August 1999 -- Six human rights groups, four from Kosovo and two internationally-based, called today on the Serbian government to release information about the thousands of ethnic Albanians who are known to have been taken into custody by Serbian forces during the NATO bombing campaign between 24 March and 12 June 1999. More than 2,000 Albanian Kosovars are in detention in Serbia, while at least 1,500 others are unaccounted for, and the lists are growing daily.

The precise number of detainees is unknown since the Serbian government has refused to provide accurate figures to lawyers or human rights groups. According to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), based on information from the Serbian Ministry of Justice, approximately 2,000 ethnic Albanians are in Serbian prisons, including people who were arrested on charges of anti-state activities prior to the NATO campaign.

The Council for the Defence of Human Rights and Freedoms, a Kosovo-based human rights group, indirectly obtained a list from the Serbian Ministry of Justice with approximately 2,000 names, although some of these detainees are not on the ICRC list. The Society for Political Prisoners in Pristina reports that many families know of relatives in Serbian prisons who are not on either list. The Humanitarian Law Centre, with offices in Belgrade and in three cities in Kosovo, has thus far confirmed that 20 people previously considered missing are in Serbian prisons, but they are also not on the lists.

Complicating matters is the large number of people taken into custody by Serbian forces during the NATO bombing whose whereabouts are currently unknown. In the city of Djakovica

(Gjakova in Albanian) alone, 1,041 people are reported missing as of 29 July 1999 many of whom are known to have been arrested between March and June 1999. Given the frequency of extrajudicial executions throughout Kosovo and the large number of unexamined graves throughout the province, there are very strong reasons to fear that some or all of the missing are dead.

The joint appeal called on the Serbian government to inform immediately family members of detainees and missing persons believed to be in custody, of the locations of detainees and the reasons for their detention. According to international law, all criminal charges must be made public and the accused must be provided with unrestricted access to a lawyer and family visits. Trials must be in full accordance with international standards.

The international community active in Kosovo should press the Serbian government at every opportunity for information on detainees and missing persons, and demand their fair treatment. The status of detainees was not addressed in the Kumanovo Agreement between NATO and the Yugoslav government or in UN Security Council Resolution 1244/99, which mandated the international presence in Kosovo. Only concerted international pressure will help ensure these people's safety, the organizations said.

ENDS.../

For an interview please call Paul Miller on mobile phone:+44-374-114-767 (in Skope) or Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on 44 171 413 5566 or visit our website at <http://www.amnesty.org>.