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Albania: Respect the right of orphans to housing

Amnesty International calls upon Albania's central and municipal authorities to implement the right of adult orphans to priority with housing.

Experience has shown that orphans, lacking family support, as adults risk poverty, social exclusion and in the case of young women in particular, sexual exploitation. Few adult orphans earn enough to buy or rent accommodation on the open market. They risk living on the margins of society unless active measures are taken by the authorities to integrate them into society. One such measure is to provide them with adequate housing.

In its report, *Albania: "No place to call home" - adult orphans and the right to housing*, Amnesty International expresses its concern that adult orphans are usually denied this right, and as a result often live in degrading conditions. The organization welcomes current government plans to build social housing for vulnerable low income families, but is concerned that given the many homeless families in need of such housing, the rights of orphans may continue to be neglected when apartments are allocated.

Amnesty International appeals to the authorities to ensure that orphans are represented on municipal housing commissions, and that the needs of orphans are adequately reflected in any points system for allocating social housing.

The right to adequate housing is enshrined in international human rights law, which requires states to give priority to the poor and disadvantaged. The particular vulnerability of orphans is recognized in Albanian law which guarantees them the right to priority with housing when they reach adulthood, as well as a range of other rights. In practice, however, few adult orphans have been able to access their right to adequate housing. Instead they may spend years sharing a room in dilapidated or even derelict secondary school residence halls or other temporary shelter, under threat of eviction. According to orphans' representatives, some 340 adult orphans, mostly aged between 25 and 40, are living in such conditions. The denial of their right to adequate housing also undermines their ability to enjoy other rights, including the right to work, driving them deeper into poverty and marginalization.

Traditionally, relatives take care of orphans and consequently the number of children in orphanages in Albania is relatively small -- at present about 600. Of these, about 400 are in state-run institutions and the others in private institutions run by non-governmental organizations.

Many of these children are so-called "social" orphans, placed there by court order because their parent or parents are unable to care for them, often due to poverty and related problems.

Amnesty International calls on the Albanian government to take effective measures to ensure that, in accordance with its own stated policy, children are placed in orphanages only as a last resort, and when this is in their best interests. It urges the Albanian authorities to significantly increase financial and other measures of support to the single parent, parents or other relatives so as to enable them to care for children at home.

The organization also calls for greater support and supervision of orphans after they leave orphanages at 14 or 15 years, to ensure that they are protected and are well-prepared for independent adult life.

Background

The Albanian government has this year secured international funding to assist in the construction of 1,100 apartments for rental by low-income homeless families, as part of its undertaking to create 4,000 apartments for social housing by 2010.

Orphans are among the groups which, by law, are to be given priority in such housing programmes. However, Albania

has a registered homeless population of over 45,000, and therefore the needs of many very vulnerable people will not be met by current housing programmes.

The organization urges the Albanian government to take further measures for the progressive fulfilment of the right to adequate housing of all disadvantaged groups, where necessary in partnership with international donors.

See: *Albania: "No place to call home" -- adult orphans and the right to housing*, (AI Index: EUR 11/005/2007)
<http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engeur110052007>

Albania: Fifteen in Korça threatened with eviction and homelessness, (AI Index: EUR 11/001/2007)
<http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engeur110012007>