

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

30 September 2011  
Index: EUR 15/002/2011

## **Bulgaria: authorities must urgently act to stop the escalation of violence targeting the Roma community**

Amnesty International urges Bulgarian authorities to effectively tackle the escalation of violence which is resulting in racially-motivated attacks against the Roma community in the country.

Following the killing of an ethnic Bulgarian youth, Angel Petrov, who was hit by a minibus driven by an ethnic Roma, Simeon Iosifov, on 23 September, protests sparked off in Katunitza (Plovdiv district). The driver was arrested the following day and an investigation is currently underway.

On 24 September further protests with a more prominent anti-Roma character were staged; three houses belonging to a Roma local leader, Kiril Rashkov, were set alight. Football fan club members from Plovdiv joined the protests, slogans inciting hatred and violence against Roma and Turks were shouted. Law enforcement forces reportedly did not stop the protesters from entering the village of Katunitza, nor were the arson attacks on properties prevented. However, no one was injured on that day and the families living in the properties attacked were evacuated by law enforcement forces.

On 25, 26 and 27 September rallies were organised in other cities by local groups, football fan clubs and Neo-Nazi groups, supported by far-right and nationalist parties such as ATAKA and VMRO. Roma neighbourhoods and Roma citizens were threatened or actually violently attacked. Figures on the overall number of injured are not available. However, Roma are reportedly afraid to leave their homes in some areas due to panic about the widespread insecurity. Around 400 people were arrested for taking part into the attacks. Some of them have been already fined for hooliganism.

Bulgarian authorities have the obligation under international human rights law to ensure the security and the physical integrity of everyone, without any discrimination. They have to exercise due diligence to prevent, investigate, punish and provide redress for racially motivated crimes by private individuals or groups. Amnesty International is monitoring the situation and urges the Bulgarian authorities to put in place all the necessary measures to stop racially-motivated attacks against Roma and to duly investigate the racial motivation in attacks against Roma neighbourhoods and individuals. Allegations that law enforcement officers made no attempt to prevent the violence on 24 September should also be subject to a full and effective investigation, with the results made public and anyone found responsible brought to justice.