

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

AI Index: EUR 65/017/2002 (Public)
News Service No: 140
15 August 2002

Embargo Date: 15 August 2002 07:00 GMT

Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia: Impunity threatens lasting peace

The continued impunity enjoyed by the perpetrators of abuses committed during the conflict in Macedonia will perpetuate lack of respect for the rule of law, Amnesty International said today as it released the report *Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia: Dark Days in Tetovo*.

Amnesty International remains concerned that the human rights abuses committed during the conflict by both sides have not been subjected to investigation and are not likely to be effectively investigated in most cases. The only exception is a very small number of cases in which the International Criminal Tribunal for former Yugoslavia has declared an interest.

"The police operate in an atmosphere of impunity and there is no indication that the violations committed by state agents will be subject to any investigation, while members of the National Liberation Army (NLA) have been granted an amnesty," the organization stated.

"The evidence from the Tetovo region indicates that the police routinely used torture and ill-treatment of ethnic Albanians both as a means of interrogation and, as many victims believed, of reprisal for actions by the NLA," the report stated.

"The NLA, which initially targeted the police and army, committed human rights abuses by abducting and ill-treating civilians and by driving ethnic Macedonians out of their homes in an apparent attempt at 'ethnic cleansing'."

Amnesty International called for the investigation and acknowledgment of human rights abuses committed during the conflict; the introduction of safeguards to prevent the recurrence of torture and ill-treatment; and implementation of steps to end impunity and ensure justice for all.

"Previous experience has shown that a failure to deliver justice to the victims of abuses and to strengthen the protection of human rights threatens a lasting peace," said the organization. The recent spate of assassinations of former NLA members by rival Albanians in the run up to the elections to be held in September underscores the need for all parties to respect human rights.

Summary of concerns:

Amnesty International's concerns, arising out of cases documented in the Tetovo region, about human rights violations committed by the authorities relate to the police treatment of detainees arrested on suspicion of conflict-related offences:

the police are alleged to have carried out arbitrary arrests; and to have subjected people who were suspected of association with the NLA to ill-treatment, in some cases amounting to torture; the pattern of widespread use of ill-treatment suggests that it may have taken place with the consent or acquiescence of senior officers; senior officers, government officials and courts, even when informed of complaints of torture or ill-treatment, failed to take action to investigate the complaints and to hold the perpetrators accountable; the system for investigating complaints is perceived as neither impartial, nor independent; in some cases detainees were denied their right to necessary medical treatment, including for injuries sustained in detention.

Violations of humanitarian law by the NLA include:

abductions of civilians. The whereabouts of some civilians remain unknown and Amnesty International fears some may have been victims of unlawful killings; injuries to civilians; displacement of civilians, the majority being ethnic Macedonians but also of other ethnic groups including Roma, Turks and Serbs.

Background to the report:

This report examines some of the specific abuses of human rights and of humanitarian law that occurred in the Tetovo region, one of the main centres of the fighting, during the most active phase of the conflict from March to September 2001. The abuses in Tetovo are illustrative of patterns of abuse and concerns in other parts of the country.

Some of the research for the report was carried out in Macedonia in June and November 2001. Interviews were carried out with ethnic Macedonians, ethnic Albanians and also with people from the Roma minority.

For details of the cases mentioned in this report, including quotes and testimonies, please see: <http://web.amnesty.org/ai.nsf/recent/eur650162002>

For more information, to receive a copy of the report (available in Macedonian, Albanian and English) or to arrange an interview please contact Judit Arenas on + 44 20 7413 5810 or on mobile + 44 7778 472 188.

The full report is available on: <http://web.amnesty.org/ai.nsf/recent/eur650072002>

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