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EXTERNAL

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Federal Republic of Yugoslavia

(Kosovo Province)

Feriz Blakçori: Death following ill-treatment in custody

Feriz Blakçori, an ethnic Albanian from Kosovo province, died on 10 December 1996 as a result of injuries sustained after his arrest the previous day, which Amnesty International believes were caused by his ill-treatment in custody.

Feriz Blakçori, who was born 15 January 1962 in a village near Podujevo, lived in Priština where he was a primary school teacher and political activist. He was arrested in the early hours of 9 December 1996 after police found a rifle during an arms search at his home in Priština. The same day he was taken to Priština hospital where he was admitted to an intensive care unit in a critical condition. According to a medical certificate issued by the hospital, on admission he was in a state of severe traumatic shock, with bruising visible on his back, legs and buttocks. He died at 9.45am the following day, Human Rights Day.

His family reportedly only learned of his death late on 11 December, when they were informed that his body was to be found at the hospital morgue.

Members of a local human rights organization who saw his body after it was returned to his family have stated that he also had bruises and/or cuts on his head, abdomen, thigh and soles of his feet. Bruising on the soles of the feet is consistent with numerous other cases of ill-treatment by the police in Kosovo province documented by Amnesty International. Feriz Blakçori's death certificate attributes his death to cardiorespiratory failure due to severe shock provoked by bruising to the head and body.

On 27 February 1997 the Humanitarian Law Centre (HLC), a Belgrade-based human rights organization, filed a complaint with the Prosecutor's Office in Priština against unidentified police officers in connection with the ill-treatment and death of Feriz Blakçori. On 3 April 1997 the HLC again urged that measures be taken to identify the officers involved and to start proceedings against them. In its reply, the Prosecutor's Office reportedly stated that it was unable to say when the officers would be identified as the Police Department had not responded to its request of 16 December 1996 for their names. On 18 April 1997 the HLC issued a press statement noting that it had called to the attention of the Serbian Minister of Justice the fact that the Prosecutor's Office in Priština was delaying or avoiding instituting criminal proceedings in cases where law enforcement officers were accused of serious violations of fundamental human rights. The HLC recalled that the competent authorities had not yet started criminal proceedings in the case of Feriz Blakçori.

Amnesty International's concern

Amnesty International is concerned that Feriz Blakçori was ill-treated by police on 9 December 1996 following his arrest and died the following day as a result of the ill-treatment. The organization is further concerned by reports that the authorities in Priština are delaying or avoiding instituting criminal proceedings against law enforcement officers responsible for the serious human rights violations which resulted in Feriz Blakçori's death. The organization notes that the police officers who commit human rights violations commonly enjoy impunity and that this policy on the part of the authorities effectively encourages the perpetration of further abuses. Amnesty International calls upon the authorities in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia to initiate a full and impartial investigation into Feriz Blakçori's ill-treatment and death without delay and to bring to justice any police officer found responsible. The organization further calls upon the authorities to grant fair and adequate compensation to the victim's family.

Background

AI has long been concerned about police abuses – specifically, daily incidents of beatings and other forms of ill-treatment – against ethnic Albanians in the predominantly Albanian-populated province of Kosovo in the Republic of Serbia. These have taken place in the context of a continued confrontation between the Serbian authorities and ethnic Albanians, the majority of whom refuse to recognize Serbian authority in the province and support the demand of the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK), Kosovo's main party representing ethnic Albanians, for the secession of the province from the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY). The LDK has consistently advocated that this goal be achieved by peaceful means, but has warned that the continuation of the present situation and the failure to start negotiations is liable to undermine belief in the effectiveness of peaceful methods and to give arguments to those who turn to violent methods.

In April 1996 a young ethnic Albanian was shot dead by a Serb civilian, who was arrested and charged. The next day five Serbs were shot dead (one of them a police officer) and four others (two of them police officers) were wounded. There have since been further attacks, usually on Serb police officers or ethnic Albanians alleged to have "collaborated" with the Serbian authorities, resulting in a dozen deaths. An organization calling itself the Liberation Army of Kosovo (*Ushtria Çlirimtare e Kosovës*), about which little is known, has claimed responsibility for most of the attacks. In January and February 1997 the authorities arrested some 100 ethnic Albanians in the province and since then some 50 of those detained have been charged with terrorist activity.

Amnesty International has no position on the question of Kosovo's status; the organization is concerned solely with the protection of the human rights of individuals. They include the right to life and the right not to be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

Both Yugoslav and international human rights treaties which the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia recognizes as legally binding (in particular the *United Nations Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment* ratified by the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1991) prohibit torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment.