

AI INDEX: EUR 15/05/95
28 SEPTEMBER 1995

BULGARIA: CONCERNS ABOUT ILL-TREATMENT OF ROMA BY BULGARIAN
POLICE OFFICERS

Alleged beatings and other ill-treatment of Roma in Bulgaria -- which have apparently been motivated by the victims' ethnic background -- should not be tolerated by the authorities, Amnesty International said in a letter to Prime Minister Zhan Videnov.

"We are particularly concerned about the case of one victim of ill-treatment, Iliya Dimitrov Gherghinov, who died in detention in suspicious circumstances," the organization said.

On 9 February 1995, two witnesses found him lying on the street near their house in Gradets, in the Sliven region, with his hands in handcuffs. A police officer, who appeared to be under the influence of alcohol, was standing over him with a long piece of wood in his hand. The officer dragged Iliya along the street holding him by his handcuffs, after which he beat him repeatedly all over the body. The beating reportedly continued in Gradets police station.

The following day Iliya Gherghinov was found lying dead on the street, with his hands still in handcuffs. The death certificate indicated hypothermia as the cause of death. However, his relatives claim that Iliya's leg was broken, that there was a large wound on the side of his face, that his genitals had been crushed and that his body was covered with bruises and his hands with cigarette burns.

Although according to Iliya's wife an investigation into her husband's death was immediately initiated, she was told by officials that no case would be filed in the next five years.

Amnesty International is calling on the Bulgarian government to ensure that the investigation into the death of Iliya Gherghinov is prompt, thorough and impartial, to make the findings public and to bring to justice anyone responsible for human rights violations.

Amnesty International also received reports of other cases. On 29 May Iliya Lombov was beaten by several police officers who came to his house in Brestovitsa, in the Plovdiv region to check identification documents. Iliya Lombov was reportedly kicked and punched while his wife, who tried to intervene, was kicked in the stomach. He was later taken to the mayor's office where the beating continued. According to a medical certificate issued after his release Iliya Lombov had lesions on the chest, right elbow, right thigh and left knee.

"The human rights situation in Bulgaria is extremely worrying, particularly when even children are at risk," the human rights organization said.

Dimitar Stankov Stankov, a 12-year-old pupil, was arrested on 5 May 1995 after the vice-principal of his primary school called the police, reporting him for theft. The police took Dimitar to the police station without notifying his parents, where he was reportedly slapped, kicked and beaten with a rubber truncheon during the interrogation.

Dimitar did not tell his parents about the incident thinking that the police would not summon him again. However, three days later he was called to the police station once more.

Hours later Dimitar's parents were called in and the investigation ended once they immediately requested an inquiry.

In its September 1994 report, *Bulgaria: Turning a blind eye to racism*, Amnesty International urged the Bulgarian government to:

- establish an independent commission, empowered to conduct a full and impartial inquiry into all allegations of ill-treatment of Roma in Bulgaria
- ensure that law enforcement officials have the basic knowledge of the rights it is their duty to protect and are given a thorough understanding of national and international human rights standards
- take measures to create public confidence that all allegations of torture or ill-treatment will be investigated promptly, impartially, openly and thoroughly.

In March 1995 Amnesty International wrote to Prime Minister Zhan Videnov about the shooting of a Rom and ill-treatment of dozens of Roma in Nova Zagora on 20 March 1995.

"We have still not received any reply concerning an investigation into these or other cases of apparently ethnically motivated ill-treatment by police officers in Bulgaria which have been brought to the attention of the Bulgarian authorities in the past three years," the human rights organization said.

ENDS\

For further information, contact Richard Bunting on 0171 814 6238 or Brian Dooley on 0171 814 6239 in the Press Office.