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Reported ill-treatment of Roma in the Montana region

Amnesty International is concerned about the rising number of incidents in which police officers have allegedly ill-treated people of Roma origin in the Montana region in northwest Bulgaria. Amnesty International believes that these incidents are indicative of a country-wide pattern of ill-treatment of Roma by law enforcement officials, and that frequently such treatment is motivated by the victims' ethnic background. Amnesty International is also concerned by the reported harassment by local authorities of witnesses and victims in ill-treatment cases in order to discourage them from giving evidence or from pursuing their complaints.

According to information received by Amnesty International, on 12 February 1997 in the village of Cherni Vrh, Dimitar Borisov Iliev was summoned to the mayor's office. He was suspected of stealing some grain but a preliminary investigation into the matter was reportedly suspended for lack of evidence. He was detained from 3.30pm until 9pm and allegedly beaten all over his body by officer G¹. A medical certificate which Dimitar Iliev obtained later described the bruises which he had suffered and which were consistent with his allegations of ill-treatment.

On 3 May 1997, Plamen Dimitrov Borisov, Iliev's 16-year-old son, was taken to the mayor's office by officer M² and ordered to stand against the wall with his hands raised. The officer reportedly held the boy by the throat and kicked him in the calves. Plamen Borisov's mother, Viktoria Ilieva, took her son to be examined by a doctor in the village of Vulchedrom, who

¹The full identity of the police officer is known to Amnesty International.

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reportedly refused to issue a certificate detailing his injuries. On 8 May 1997, in the presence of the village mayor, officer G reportedly threatened Viktoria Ilieva: "Listen, you have one month to sell the house and move out of the village. If not, I will send "wrestlers" [a colloquial term for the private security guards] to deal with you." There are around 20 Roma families in Cherni Vrh and many other Roma had reportedly been beaten by the same officers but were afraid to file complaints.

On 29 March 1997 in Yakimovo, Yordan Kirilov and his wife along with two other Roma families were digging for scrap iron in the yard of an abandoned tile factory. At around 10.30am the mayor of Yakimovo and officer G arrived; the latter reportedly shot twice in the

air. The officer

then questioned Yordan Kirilov about the digging and reportedly hit him with his gun and punched him in the head. Yordan Kirilov later went to the local doctor and was treated for head injuries, but was allegedly refused a certificate and told: "You don't need a certificate because you wouldn't be able to do anything with it."

On 14 April 1997 in Vulchedrom, at around 9am, 50-year-old Darina Naidenova Pacheva went to the police station in response to a summons and was questioned about the theft of some hens. She was reportedly beaten on the hands with a truncheon and made to kneel on a stool and beaten on the soles of her feet. As he pulled her by the hair, officer M reportedly told her: "I will get all you Gypsies." He then hit her on the left shoulder and twice on the head. Darina Naidenova Pacheva was released later in the afternoon when a younger officer made sure that she was well enough to go home by herself. She then went to her daughter in Kozloduy where she was medically examined and issued with a certificate describing the injuries on her shoulder, hands and soles of her feet.

On 16 May 1997 at around 7am in the village of Yakitovo, Yordanka Borisova was taken from her house by officer G and another officer to the police station in Lom. As she got out of the car, the two officers reportedly started to beat her, accusing her of stealing a hen and some other goods. The beating of Yordanka Borisova continued in the station until a third police officer intervened and instructed his colleagues to release her.



To discuss these and a number of other complaints about police ill-treatment in the region, the Human Rights Project, a local non-governmental organization, organized a public meeting with the Montana authorities on 4 June 1997. An Amnesty International representative who took part in the discussion urged the Regional Police Directorate to suspend from duty officers M and G who were most frequently cited as alleged perpetrators in the ill-treatment complaints, pending a prompt and impartial investigation.

In July 1997 Amnesty International was informed that on 5 June 1997, the day after the discussions with the Montana authorities, in Vulchedrom, Danail Nedkov Mladenov, a 23-year-old Rom, was taken to the local police office by officers M and Y³. Danail Nedkov Mladenov was reportedly beaten by four police officers who questioned him about the theft of a goat and a pig. He was ordered to kneel on a stool and was reportedly beaten on the soles with a rubber truncheon. He was also forced to hold his hands out and was beaten with the truncheon on his palms. At around 6pm Danail Nedkov signed a statement "confessing" to the theft. When he told officer M that he would file a complaint, M reportedly replied: "What did Darina achieve with her complaint?" A medical certificate issued to Danail Nedkov Mladenov on 6 June 1997

³The full identity of the police officer is known to Amnesty International.

described bruising on the buttocks and the soles of his feet, which was consistent with his allegations of ill-treatment.

Amnesty International is concerned that if confirmed these incidents of ill-treatment of Roma in the Montana region would represent a violation of Bulgaria's international treaty obligations. These include Article 7 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and Article 3 of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, which state that no one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

As a State Party to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (Convention against Torture), Bulgaria is bound to initiate a prompt and impartial investigation whenever an individual has alleged that torture or other ill-treatment has occurred or, even if no complaint has been made, there are reasonable grounds to believe that such ill-treatment has occurred. Amnesty International urges the Bulgarian authorities to ensure that the investigations into the above incidents of ill-treatment are thorough and impartial, that the findings are made public, and that anyone responsible for human rights violations is brought to justice.

Amnesty International is also concerned that the alleged harassment of Viktoria Petrova Ilieva, if confirmed, would be in violation of Article 13 of the Convention against Torture, which obliges Bulgaria to take measures which would ensure "that the complainant and witnesses are protected against all ill-treatment or intimidation as a consequence of his complaint or any evidence given". Amnesty International is seeking information on the steps taken by Bulgarian authorities to protect Viktoria Petrova Ilieva and her family from further police harassment