

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

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## **FRY(Kosovo): End deliberate attacks on Serb civilians**

*Amnesty International today condemned this morning's unprovoked attack on a convoy of buses travelling north of Podujevo in northern Kosovo near the border with Serbia proper, thought to have been carried out by armed ethnic Albanians. The buses – under a heavy escort of Swedish Kosovo Force (KFOR) troops – were carrying Serb civilians from the town of Strpce in southern Kosovo to Serbia.*

*Latest reports suggest that seven people have been killed and at least 35 have been injured, at least ten of them seriously, when the lead bus was attacked. A spokesperson for KFOR reported that the explosion – probably a mine – was automatically triggered, and completely destroyed the first bus in the convoy.*

*"From the reports we have received, it appears that this attack on unarmed Serb civilians was clearly well planned and was deliberately aimed to cause injury and death," a spokesperson for Amnesty International said today. "AI condemns such deliberate, arbitrary and unlawful killings."*

*The human rights organization calls on the United Nations interim Mission In Kosovo (UNMIK) to ensure that those responsible are apprehended and brought to justice.*

*The convoy of seven buses – known as the Niš express – was carrying an estimated 200 Serb passengers. Buses carrying Serb civilians*

are regularly escorted through Kosovo by KFOR to enable the Serb minority to go shopping and to visit relatives in Serbia.

Though no group has claimed responsibility for this morning's attack, a machine-gun attack on Tuesday on another bus carrying Serb civilians on the Urosevac-Strpce road which resulted in the death of one man and the injury of three people earlier this week has been attributed by UNMIK to armed ethnic Albanians. Five suspects have been arrested in connection with that incident. Tensions have been high in Strpce since Tuesday. Additional KFOR troops were brought in on Wednesday to calm the situation after a group of around 1000 local Serb residents attacked the UNMIK building and UN vehicles on Tuesday evening.

## **Background**

Members of the Serb community have increasingly come under attack both in Kosovo and in southern Serbia since the escalation of tension in the region last November. This followed the seizure of the five kilometre-wide Ground Safety zone (established under the Kumanovo Military-Technical Agreement of June 1999) between Kosovo and Serbia proper by the armed ethnic-Albanian opposition group, the Liberation Army of Preševo, Medvedje and Bujanovac (UÇPMB). The area has since been intensively policed by KFOR troops. A peace plan proposed by the governments of Serbia and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia has recently been rejected by civilian representatives of the ethnic Albanian community in the region, and by the UÇPMB, who want the three municipalities to be part of Kosovo, rather than Serbia.

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For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566

Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW web : <http://www.amnesty.org>