

Public Statement

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Yugoslavia: Amnesty International demands fair trials

Amnesty International welcomes the decision of Serbia's Supreme Court to release 143 ethnic Albanians, the so-called Djakovica group. The organization believes that their trials breached international standards and national procedures at every stage, from pretrial custody to the trials themselves.

Amnesty International emphasizes that the right to a fair trial is a basic human right as set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the United Nation (UN) in 1948 and reaffirmed in the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) adopted by the UN in 1996, and to which the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia is a party.

Amnesty International is also calling on the Serb authorities to review the cases of about 400 ethnic Albanians held in Serbian prisons the majority of whom were convicted and sentenced in unfair trials. If a review of the evidence establishes that they have a case to answer, they should be granted a fair retrial - in accordance with international standards within a reasonable time. Otherwise they should be immediately released, and should be given the right to appropriate compensation under national law.

Background

The Djakovica group, 143 ethnic Albanians from the town Djakovica in Kosovo, were arrested in 1999 by Serb forces and convicted of "association for the purposes of hostile activity in connection with terrorism" under Articles 125, 139 and 22 of the Constitution of the

Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. The men were sentenced in May 2000 in a mass trial by the Nis District Court to jail terms between seven and 13 years. These trials did not meet the minimum standards for a fair trial as set out in international instruments.

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