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## **Federal Republic of Yugoslavia: Time the authorities listened and acted!**

As the Contact Group for the former Yugoslavia meets in Rome today, Amnesty International is calling on the Serbian and Yugoslav authorities to once and for all stop the killing, torture and ill-treatment of people in Kosovo province and listen to the need to respect human rights.

“We believe that the Contact Group should ensure that a comprehensive human rights agenda is adopted by the Yugoslav authorities -- and that the international community oversees this agenda -- so that they are not allowed to get away with hiding and destroying evidence of atrocities such as the executions carried out by their security forces in Kosovo in March,” Amnesty International said today.

“It is only when such evidence is revealed and the perpetrators are held to account for their crimes that there is some hope of preventing the security forces from carrying out further abuses.”

While it is difficult to ascertain the exact circumstances in which people have been killed in the last few days, it is clear that human rights violations such as torture and “disappearances” abound in the province.

Amnesty International believes that to prevent any further abuses and ensure that past human rights violations are properly addressed it is imperative that the Contact Group ensures that the following minimum recommendations are implemented:

- The Serbian and Yugoslav authorities should allow independent investigation of recent human rights abuses, particularly the killings which occurred between 28 February and 6 March in the villages of Likošane, Ćirez and Donji Prekaz, and should initiate their own thorough, independent and impartial investigations into the conduct of the police.
- The authorities should ensure that criminal investigations and procedures are initiated to hold to account any officers suspected of ordering or perpetrating human rights violations.
- The authorities should allow the opening of the field office of the United Nations (UN) Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) which the High Commissioner has requested in Priština. The authorities should grant permission for an extended temporary human rights monitoring mission of the OHCHR as recommended in the letter of the Special Rapporteur responsible for Yugoslavia, Jiří Dienstbier, to the UN Commission on Human Rights dated 14 April 1998.
- The authorities should take immediate steps to prevent human rights violations against detainees such as ensuring proper access and information for defence counsel, doctors and relatives and the immediate investigation of all allegations of torture.

- The contributing governments should ensure that the OHCHR field offices in Yugoslavia are properly resourced to meet the demands placed upon them.

Amnesty International cites the case of Mehmet Memqaj and three other ethnic Albanian men accused of “terrorism” who are expected to appear before the District Court in Prizren next Monday 4 May. The men were tortured in pre-trial detention with electric shock batons and Amnesty International fears that their trial will be grossly unfair.

A similar fate may await other detainees given the daily reports of ill-treatment and frequent reports of “disappearances”. On 10 April Dr Hafir Shala from Glogovac was detained by police in Priština. His family and lawyer have received no information about his whereabouts, despite repeated requests to the authorities.

## **BACKGROUND**

At the end of February and beginning of March Serbian police operating in military formations killed more than 80 ethnic Albanians in the villages of Likošane, Ćirez and Donji Prekaz in the Drenica region of Kosovo. Direct evidence collected by Amnesty International shows that several of the men were extrajudicially executed – they were shot as they were taken out of the house where they had been sheltering with women and children. Moreover, the excessive force used by the police most likely resulted in the extrajudicial execution of other unarmed people among the victims, including at least 11 children and 12 women. The authorities subsequently destroyed or hid evidence by removing bodies from the site and disposing of them without ensuring that autopsies were carried out.

In the last few days at least 26 more people have been killed, this time by the Yugoslav Army as well as the police. Independent information about the circumstances of their death is not yet available, but Amnesty International fears that further human rights violations have been or will be perpetrated in such cases.

Police misleadingly claimed that Mehmet Memqaj and other four ethnic Albanian men had been taken into custody in their operations in Drenica. Yet at least two of the men turned out to have been arrested in and around the town of Prizren on 27 February before the police operation started. The men were reportedly tortured in detention with electric shock batons to extract confessions in connection with charges brought against them of “terrorism” and “association for the purpose of hostile activity”. They are accused of having organized themselves as part of the “National Movement for the Republic of Kosovo”, planted a bomb in Prizren town and obtained and stored weapons.

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