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Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY): Agreement on Kosovo must include immediate action and a long-term commitment to human rights

This morning's announcements of a possible agreement on the crisis in Kosovo province must be backed up with an agenda which spells out firm commitments in the field of human rights, Amnesty International urged today.

"Human rights protection and promotion must drive all current efforts towards a settlement of the critical situation in Kosovo. What we must see is a serious, consistent and long-term commitment backed up by immediate action," the human rights organization said.

"Today's statements only address the security and political considerations and talks about a 'verification' mission. The cease-fire monitors being proposed cannot on their own ensure the safety of the displaced persons and others at risk such as detainees. Human rights monitors must be deployed alongside them," Amnesty International added.

Amnesty International is calling on US envoy, Ambassador Richard Holbrooke, the Yugoslav President, Slobodan Milošević, governments of the Contact Group on the former Yugoslavia and other relevant governments and international organizations to heed a series of recommendations.

In its recommendations Amnesty International highlights:

- The pressing need for adequately resourced human rights monitors, with a clear mandate independent of any political process, to be part of any international presence in Kosovo and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY). They are needed urgently to monitor the situation of displaced persons and ensure that any returns take place in safety and dignity; and verify independently reports of human rights abuses.
- The need to provide information about, and access to, detainees from Kosovo who are at risk of torture and ill-treatment and information about those who are "disappeared" or "missing".
- The need for impunity to be addressed; for the FRY authorities to allow the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia full and unimpeded access to the country; transfer indicted suspects into the jurisdiction of the Tribunal; and for the Serbian authorities themselves to take action against perpetrators of human rights abuses.
- The need to protect fully the safety of journalists and human rights activists in FRY and to guarantee non-governmental organizations and the independent media are able to function without interference.

- The need for long-term measures such as the retraining and restructuring of the police and establishment of effective national human rights institutions which allow individuals immediate access for redress of human rights violations.
- The need for those who have had their houses or property deliberately destroyed to be able to seek reparation, including compensation for reconstruction.

Background information

After many days of negotiations backed by the threat of military intervention by forces of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), it was announced in Washington DC, USA, that an agreement is being reached between Ambassador Holbrooke and FRY President, Slobodan Milošević. US President, Bill Clinton, was quoted as saying that: *“President Milošević has made a series of commitments. If fully implemented, and that is a critical and very big if, these commitments could achieve the international community’s objectives as stated in the United Nations [UN] resolution.”*

The UN Security Council Resolution in question, 1199 (1998), included some important references to human rights concerns, but failed to spell out the specific human rights concerns highlighted above. In particular the Resolution does not address human rights concerns in any future negotiations on or settlement of the situation around Kosovo.

In recent days, in the face of the threat of NATO intervention, the Serbian authorities including Deputy Prime Minister, Vojislav Šešelj, are reported to have made threats against the physical security of journalists working for foreign media or independent media organizations in FRY and non-governmental organizations engaged in human rights protection.

In Kosovo itself, although there are reports of the return of some displaced persons to their homes as fighting has largely ceased, thousands of ethnic Albanians are still reported to be living outside in poor weather. Amnesty International continues to receive allegations of the ill-treatment and torture of ethnic Albanians, and remains concerned for these victims as well as the relatives of hundred of people of all nationalities who have been unlawfully killed or who are “missing”. Many of the “missing” are feared to have been detained or unlawfully killed, either by the security forces, the Kosovo Liberation Army or other armed ethnic Albanians.

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Amnesty International’s recommendations are contained in the document: *FRY: Essential human rights guarantees for Kosovo - Amnesty International’s Recommendations, AI Index: EUR 70/77/98.*