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KOSOVO: HUMAN RIGHTS CONCERNS LEFT OUT OF DRAFT PEACE PLAN

After analysing the reported version of the emerging peace plan proposed to end the conflict in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Amnesty International expressed concern that human rights remain peripheral in the continuing international discussions.

“We have not heard a single mention of human rights, humanitarian law or the duty to bring to justice those suspected of human rights violations,” Amnesty International Secretary General Pierre Sané said today.

“Nothing has been said about consultations with human rights groups and the local population about how any peace-keeping operation is implemented,” Mr Sané stressed.

“The human rights violations that have taken place in Kosovo during the past 10 years might have been prevented if effective steps had been taken,” Mr Sané said. “To stop further violations there need to be solid guarantees of human rights for everyone concerned.”

Effective and long-term protection of the human rights of all the people of Kosovo, whether ethnic Albanian or ethnic Serb, whether in Kosovo or outside, should be at the centre of any agreement, Amnesty International said.

An impartial, independent assessment of the human rights situation in Kosovo must be done before any return of refugees is promoted, the human rights organization said. Refugees have a right to continuing international protection until the situation in their country undergoes a durable and fundamental improvement. Mere cessation of the hostilities is not enough.

“Amnesty International fears for any civilian returning in the immediate aftermath of an armed conflict where they may face deprivations and dangers, such as booby-traps, minefields and further killings and ‘disappearances’,” Mr Sané said. “We urge that any international peace-keeping presence, therefore, take all possible steps to ensure that civilians return to a safe and secure environment.”

Independent human rights monitors need to have unhindered access to all parts of Kosovo and the FRY and to have adequate resources in any international presence in Kosovo. Human rights monitors should have a strong voice that is separate from the decision-making structure of the peace-keeping operations, Amnesty International said.

Non-governmental organizations -- including local human rights defenders -- should be included in this monitoring and assessment process.

Amnesty International reminded the diplomats who are drafting further discussion documents in advance of next week's G-8 Summit that it is the duty of any international peace-keeping presence to bring to justice those responsible for human rights violations.

“Any agreement should make explicit that immediate, independent and impartial investigations begin into violations of human rights committed by any party during the conflict,” Mr Sané said. “All those who have perpetrated human rights abuses -- including those responsible for grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions, other war crimes or crimes against humanity -- must answer for their actions in a court of law.”

Amnesty International noted that peace-keeping operations have classically been developed by diplomats far away from the people affected by war and civil strife, while local and international human rights organizations and others involved in monitoring human rights are ignored.

“The world should not decide the fate of the Kosovo people without listening to their fears and wishes,” Mr Sané said. “The crisis that has cost so many lives and created so much pain resulted from the international community failing to heed warnings to protect their human rights. We hope the world’s nations will not fail Kosovo again.”

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