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NEWS SERVICE ITEMS: EXTERNAL - BULGARIA, SWITZERLAND, TURKEY (x2)

PLEASE NOTE: French and German translations of the enclosed item on Switzerland and the accompanying report should be ready in time for the embargo.

NEWS INITIATIVES - INTERNAL

INTERNATIONAL NEWS RELEASES

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FORTHCOMING NEWS INITIATIVES

Saudi Arabia - 10 May - More details to follow
Annual Report - 7 July - SEE NEWS SERVICE 51/94

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**AI INDEX: EUR 15/WU 02/1994
23 March 1994**

BULGARIA: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL CONCERNED BY ATTACKS ON ROMA COMMUNITY

Amnesty International is gravely concerned about reports of racially motivated attacks on the Roma community in the village of Dolno Belotintsi that started on 25 February 1994 and have continued sporadically ever since. The human rights organization is particularly concerned by reports that most of the Roma community have been forced to abandon their homes and flee from the village after authorities failed adequately to protect them.

According to the reports received by Amnesty International the attacks and harassment of the Roma in Dolno Belotintsi began on 25 February after a soldier, who had deserted from his unit, robbed and murdered a resident of the village. The soldier, who is a member of the Roma community, was caught by the villagers and handed over to the police.

That evening a series of attacks against Roma homes began in order to force the Roma community, numbering around 20 families, to leave the village. Roma homes were broken into, the windows were smashed and furniture and other household belongings were deliberately destroyed. Many of the homes broken into were empty at the time, their inhabitants having fled in fear. Later in the night a group of men from the village, armed with guns, knives, axes, pitch forks and stakes, forced around 30 Roma to leave their homes and ordered them to march to Nikolovo, a village some three kilometres away, and back. The majority of the Roma forced on this march were women with children and elderly people who had not fled from the village. One of them, Vania Nikolova, marched together with her 10-day-old baby. During the march they were insulted with racist slurs, threatened that they would be thrown off a bridge and some of the women were threatened with sexual assaults.

The attacks reportedly continued with the same intensity for the next two days. Following a village meeting on 27 February, a letter was sent to the President of the Republic demanding both the expulsion of the Roma from the village, and the lifting of the moratorium on the carrying out of the death penalty. Only three of about 20 Roma families were given "permission" to remain in the village. It was decided that the others would be expelled.

Although complaints were filed by the victims of the attacks several times, including after the forced march and again after the village meeting, they reportedly failed to receive protection from the Regional Police Department and the County Prosecutor at any time. A local police officer, stationed in the village, claimed that he had not been present when the forced march and the village meeting took place. The officer also reportedly said that during the other attacks on Roma homes, which he had witnessed, he had called the Regional Police Department for reinforcements but was not sent any and had been afraid to intervene by himself. As a result of these attacks most of the Roma have now fled the village.

Amnesty International believes that the alleged lack of adequate protection from racial violence for the Roma community in Dolno Belotintsi represents a flagrant violation of the international human rights standards to which Bulgaria is a party. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights states that each State Party undertakes to respect and to ensure to all individuals within its territory and subject to its jurisdiction the rights recognized in the Covenant, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.

Amnesty International has frequently written to the Bulgarian Government expressing its concern about reports that Roma had been tortured or otherwise ill-treated by police officers. Each time the organization has urged the Bulgarian Government to fulfil its obligations as a State Party to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and to

initiate prompt and impartial investigations, to make public their findings and to bring to justice anyone responsible for human rights violations. However, no reply has yet been received from the Bulgarian Government regarding any of these cases. Amnesty International is concerned that this apparent impunity may lead to further acts of racial violence, such as those perpetrated in the village of Dolno Belotintsi.

Following the events in Dolno Belotintsi, Amnesty International has again written to the Bulgarian government and is urging a prompt, thorough and independent inquiry into these incidents, and to be informed of its findings.

Amnesty International would also like to be informed about what measures the Bulgarian authorities have taken to ensure that members of the Roma community who were forced to leave Dolno Belotintsi can return safely to their homes.

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AI INDEX: EUR 43/WU 01/1994
EMBARGOED FOR 19 APRIL 1994

SWITZERLAND: ALLEGATIONS OF ILL-TREATMENT IN POLICE CUSTODY: A SUBSTANTIAL CAUSE FOR CONCERN

Amnesty International today said there was "substantial cause for concern" about reports received over several years that police officers in Switzerland have used deliberate and unwarranted physical violence against people in their custody.

Tomorrow, the United Nations (UN) Committee against Torture (CAT) will be examining a report submitted by the Swiss Government about how it has implemented the UN Convention against Torture in the country. An earlier report from Switzerland was examined in Geneva in April 1989.

Amnesty International has drawn the Committee's attention to its own report detailing its concerns regarding allegations of police ill-treatment of detainees in Switzerland and hopes that the Committee will take these into account when examining the Swiss Government's submission.

The most common forms of ill-treatment reported are repeated slaps, kicks and punches, heavy pressure on the windpipe causing near-asphyxiation and enforced stripping for no apparent reason except to cause humiliation. Many of the allegations concern foreigners and Swiss citizens of non-European descent and verbal racial abuse has been frequently reported in such cases.

Michel Acquaroli, a 36-year-old Geneva architect, was reportedly nearly asphyxiated by police on 21 April 1993, when they came to his office regarding a small outstanding national insurance (AVS) payment. When he suggested settling the matter over the telephone and moved to the next room to make the call, one of the officers reportedly twisted his arm violently and pushed his knee into his back, making him fall to the floor.

The other officer handcuffed his wrists behind his back, the first officer keeping his arm pressed so tightly around his neck that he felt he was being strangled. His girlfriend, present throughout the incident, stated that he was fighting for breath, making a rattling noise in his throat, and became blue in the face with his tongue hanging out and turning a purplish colour. The police ignored her pleas for them to stop.

The police have commonly responded to medical evidence of injuries to detainees by stating that the injuries were sustained while resisting arrest. There are claims that detainees are often threatened with counter-charges of defamation or resisting state officers when they indicate their intention of lodging a formal complaint of ill-treatment.

For example, during his detention in a Geneva police station, Acquaroli made a formal complaint against the police. He said that while he was making his statement the two officers who had assaulted him stood over the table and threatened him with imprisonment if he persisted with his complaint. He received a medical examination which noted injuries to his body and the police then arrested him for resisting official actions, placed him in a cell and made him strip naked.

Some ill-treated detainees are, therefore, reluctant to identify themselves or to report their treatment to the prosecuting authorities. Judicial and administrative investigations into formal complaints of ill-treatment frequently appear to lack thoroughness and very rarely result in disciplinary or criminal sanctions against law enforcement officers.

The reports of ill-treatment by police have come from several cantons -- a high proportion from the Canton of Geneva. They originate from a variety of sources and their nature and content are largely consistent. The Council of Europe's Committee for the

Prevention of Torture and other, non-governmental, organizations such as the Geneva-based Association for the Prevention of Torture and the Swiss Human Rights League, have also reported receiving numerous such allegations.

Amnesty International's report concludes that the number of allegations of ill-treatment it has received, taken together with the findings of other reputable international governmental and non-governmental organizations, indicate a substantial cause for concern.

Amnesty International's report is entitled:
Switzerland: Allegations of ill-treatment in police custody, AI Index: EUR 43/02/94.

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AI INDEX: EUR 44/WU 09/1994
EMBARGOED FOR 30 APRIL 1994

TURKEY: DISCRIMINATION PUTS NON-EUROPEAN ASYLUM-SEEKERS AT RISK

The protection of refugees in Turkey has reached a crisis point, putting the security of hundreds of refugees and asylum-seekers at risk, said an Amnesty International report released today.

Recently, hundreds of Iraqis, as well as Iranians and Tunisians, have been forcibly returned to the countries they came from, even though many of them risk serious human rights violations in those countries. By contrast, in the late 1980s, some 330,000 ethnic Turks who fled Bulgaria were granted protection in Turkey and, more recently, more than 20,000 Bosnian Muslim refugees have been accepted in Turkey since the conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina began in 1992.

"While Turkey is entitled to control admission to its territory, this must not conflict with its international human rights obligations; everyone -- from whatever country -- has a universally recognized right to protection against return to a place where they face imprisonment, torture or death," according to the human rights organization.

Amnesty International calls on the Turkish government to abide by its international obligations not to forcibly return people to countries where they risk serious human rights violations, to establish fair and effective asylum procedures for all asylum-seekers, and to give public assurances that recent security agreements with other countries will not imperil refugees and asylum-seekers.

During the past few months, more than 300 Iraqis have been forcibly returned from Turkey to northern Iraq. These included several recognized as refugees and others whose cases were being considered by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR); some were awaiting resettlement in other countries. In January this year at least six Iranian asylum-seekers, including one recognized as a refugee, were expelled. In 1993 two Tunisian refugees were imprisoned in Tunisia after being forcibly returned there by the Turkish authorities.

Under the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, such forced return is prohibited. The Turkish government says its obligation is only to Europeans, in keeping with the convention's original focus on those who became refugees in the aftermath of the Second World War. But of the more than 120 countries who are parties to the convention and subsequent protocol, only Turkey and two other states maintain this geographic limitation.

Turkey is at the heart of a region troubled by conflict. In the late 1980s thousands of Iraqis fled there in the wake of atrocious human rights violations by the Iraqi Government, and a further 500,000 fled there from the violent suppression of an uprising in Iraq after the end of the 1991 Gulf War. Hundreds of Iranian asylum-seekers enter Turkey every year. And in the past two years dozens of Tunisians fleeing torture and ill-treatment have sought protection in Turkey.

There are no legal provisions for non-Europeans to apply for asylum to the Turkish authorities. An informal arrangement has developed over the years between the UNHCR and the Turkish government, allowing non-European asylum-seekers to stay in Turkey while their cases are examined by UNHCR and until a resettlement country is found for those recognized as refugees. But now this arrangement appears to be breaking down. In late December 1993, for example, several Iraqi asylum-seekers were arrested by Turkish police as they approached the UNHCR office in Ankara and, despite UNHCR protests, were forcibly returned to Iraq.

Even within Turkey, asylum-seekers are insecure, at risk of harassment and ill-treatment by Turkish police. As well, since August 1993, three Iranians who were members of opposition groups have been assassinated in Turkey, in circumstances suggesting the

killings may have been carried out by Iranian agents. The climate of insecurity is heightened by protocols agreed with Iran concerning common security problems and enforcement of existing extradition agreements. Although Turkish officials insist such agreements do not extend to those fleeing political persecution, Amnesty International remains concerned that the security protocols may in fact obstruct Iranian asylum-seekers fleeing violations of their human rights. Moreover, in January 1993, the Turkish government also agreed with Tunisia to bar that nation's opposition movement members from sheltering in Turkey, and to inform on their activities if found.

Amnesty International calls on the Turkish authorities to remove the geographic limitation preventing non-European refugees from obtaining asylum in Turkey, to establish fair and satisfactory procedures for handling all asylum claims, and to give public assurances that security agreements with other countries will neither obstruct individuals from seeking asylum in Turkey nor allow for their forcible return to countries where they face serious human rights violations.

Since non-European refugees are not currently permitted to remain in Turkey, resettlement in another country is the only way they can obtain effective protection; for those who are not granted resettlement the risk of deportation increases as the months go by. Amnesty International urges countries operating resettlement programs to deal with resettlement applications quickly and to take full account of the risks faced by the refugees. Amnesty International also calls on other governments not to return any non-European asylum-seeker to Turkey, because the country does not provide effective protection for non-European asylum-seekers.

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TURKEY: HARASSMENT OF HUMAN RIGHTS MONITORS IN SOUTHEAST - WHAT IS TURKEY HIDING?

Amnesty International is concerned about the reported harassment and obstruction of foreign delegations visiting Turkey to monitor the situation in the southeastern provinces during Nevruz, the Kurdish new year on 21 March and the local elections on 27 March. In 1992 more than a hundred Kurdish civilians were killed by security forces during disturbances following demonstrations in connection with Nevruz.

More than 300 journalists, human rights activists, lawyers and politicians from abroad went as observers to the mainly Kurdish southeastern provinces where emergency legislation is in force. Many have reported that they are being prevented from moving around and from making contact with local people, or investigating reports of human rights violations - in several cases police have confiscated delegates' passports and forbidden them to leave their hotels, or required that police be present to witness any dialogue with representatives from the Turkish Human Rights Association (THRA), or even between delegations.

Two delegations from Germany were deported from Van to Istanbul and Ankara, and two members of the local branch of the THRA were detained by police, but later released. Ali Kurt and Zeynel K_rak, interpreters accompanying a delegation from Frankfurt, were detained in the town of Dicle in Diyarbak_r province, while the delegation was moved to Diyarbak_r.

Seven members of a British delegation travelling to Siirt were taken from their bus, detained with their Kurdish interpreter and questioned before being released. A Swiss delegation of 10, which was detained on arrival at the airport in Van, but released two hours later, reported that their every move was accompanied by a heavy police escort. A British delegation reported that the security forces were taking notes of and filming their conversations with local people.

In January, Amnesty International stated that an information blackout was being used to conceal human rights violations committed by security forces in the area under emergency legislation. While torture has been a long-standing concern in Turkey, the organization has recorded hundreds of political killings since 1991, many in circumstances which suggest security force involvement. In recent months, "disappearances" - mainly of Kurdish political activists and villagers - have increased sharply. Amnesty International has also addressed the leadership of the Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK), condemning the threats made by them against any civilians breaking the PKK's boycott of the local elections. Two candidates have already been shot dead, apparently by members of the PKK.

Amnesty International believes that scrutiny by local and foreign observers is vital if further human rights abuses, not only by the security forces, but also by guerrillas of the PKK are to be prevented.

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