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Greece: Fair trial proceedings for alleged unlawful killing

Greek authorities must take all necessary steps to ensure that the proceedings against a police officer accused of a fatal shooting comply with international fair trial standards, Amnesty International said today.

"The rights of the accused, including the right to the presumption of innocence, and those of the victim's family, must be duly respected," the organization said on the eve of the trial proceedings scheduled to start on 3 November 2004.

18-year-old Albanian Vullnet Bytyci was fatally wounded by a Greek police officer when he tried to cross the Greek-Albanian border on 23 September 2003. In letters to the government, dated 27 October, Amnesty International reiterated its concerns regarding this death, namely the misuse of firearms by the police, policing of Greece's north-western border and the treatment of Albanian migrants.

"The Greek authorities must ensure that the statements of all witnesses are thoroughly examined. For this purpose all crucial witnesses, as well as the victim's family, must be able to attend the trial. They must be provided with professional interpreting services," Amnesty International said.

Background

Vullnet Bytyci, from the village of Muc-Has in the Has district of Albania, was shot on the evening of 23 September 2003 while clandestinely crossing the border into Greece together with five other Albanian citizens. According to official reports the group was observed by three border guards, who called to them to stop. Four members of the group complied, and were arrested, while Vullnet Bytyci and another man fled. One of the guards fired after them, fatally wounding Vullnet Bytyci, who was pronounced dead on being admitted to Kastoria hospital the same evening. The guard in question was originally charged with "reckless homicide" and is now facing a charge of manslaughter.

In a letter to the government dated 14 October 2003, Amnesty International expressed concerns with regard to several incidents in which Greek law enforcement officials are alleged to have severely ill-treated or used firearms against unarmed Albanian citizens in areas of Greece bordering Albania, while the latter were entering or leaving Greece. In light of incidents of alleged human rights violations on the Greek-Albanian border both before and since that date, Amnesty International remains particularly concerned about their persistence.

See also: *Europe and Central Asia: Concerns in Europe and Central Asia: July - December 2003*, AI Index: EUR 01/001/2004 <http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engeur010012004>

Greece: In the Shadow of Impunity – Ill-treatment and the misuse of firearms, joint report by Amnesty International and International Helsinki Federation, AI Index: EUR 25/022/2002
<http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engeur250222002>

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