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ALBANIA: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL APPEALS FOR THE RELEASE OF TWO PRISONERS OF CONSCIENCE

In the run up to the appeals of prisoners Fatos Nano, leader of the Socialist Party of Albania, and Ilir Hoxha, son of Enver Hoxha, the former communist ruler of Albania, Amnesty International is calling on the President of Albania to immediately release them.

"Even though the charges against the two men are very different, neither of them have used or advocated violence but have been imprisoned solely for their political beliefs," Amnesty International said today in a letter to President Sali Berisha.

"The organization considers the two men prisoners of conscience and as such they should be released immediately."

In the wake of a recent report documenting police ill-treatment and deaths in custody, Amnesty International believes that the release of Fatos Nano and Ilir Hoxha would demonstrate a commitment by Albania to respect its international human rights commitments, including those arising out of its recent entry to the Council of Europe.

Next month, the Court of Cassation is due to review an appeal made for the release of Fatos Nano, who was arrested in July 1993. On 3 April 1994 he was found guilty of falsification of official documents and embezzlement of state property -- in the form of emergency aid -- to the benefit of a third party. He was sentenced to 12 years' imprisonment, a sentence which has since been reduced.

After examining the verdict of the District Court of Tirana and other relevant documentation, Amnesty International concluded that the charges brought against Fatos Nano were politically motivated and had not been substantiated by the evidence produced at the trial hearing.

The organization is also concerned about numerous breaches of procedure throughout the proceedings which had significantly restricted the right of the defendant and his lawyers to acquaint themselves with the charges and with the full documentation of the case. The breaches also denied them "equality of arms" in terms of proposing witnesses and experts.

The case of Ilir Hoxha raised different issues: on 8 June 1995 he was sentenced to a year's imprisonment on charges of "inciting hatred against sections of the population" under the new Criminal Code. This sentence was upheld on appeal. The charges arose out of an interview he gave to the magazine *Modeste* in which he defended his father's record and criticized that of the present government.

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Amnesty International considers him to be imprisoned for the non-violent exercise of his right to freedom of expression, in violation of Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights to which Albania is a State Party.

Amnesty International is urging the government to ensure that all citizens, whatever their views, enjoy the right to the peaceful exercise of freedom of expression and political association.

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