

AI INDEX: EUR 11/11/97

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE -- 14 MARCH

**ALBANIA: INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY MUST PROTECT ALBANIAN
ASYLUM-SEEKERS**

Albanian asylum-seekers must receive effective and durable protection by governments in the region, and the international community should ensure that effective assistance is afforded to countries neighbouring Albania, Amnesty International said today.

"Responsibility for hosting refugees should be shared equitably," the organization said.

The breakdown of law and order in Albania and the widespread availability of weapons threatens to lead to civil war and serious human rights violations. Parts of the country are living in utter lawlessness, and the current inability of the government to ensure the protection of all its citizens is leading many of them to flee to neighbouring countries.

The organization is encouraged at reports that some countries -- in cooperation with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) -- are currently preparing to admit refugees from Albania. Other neighbouring countries, however, have reportedly closed their borders.

Amnesty International is appealing to all the governments of the region to respect their international obligations towards refugees and asylum-seekers, in particular the fundamental principle of *non refoulement* -- which forbids any state from sending a person to a country where he or she would face serious human rights violations.

"The principle of *non refoulement* -- which includes non-rejection at the frontier -- must be observed scrupulously under all circumstances," Amnesty International said.

...ENDS/