

BULGARIA

The reported ill-treatment and death under suspicious circumstances of Angel Zubchikov

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL'S CONCERN:

Amnesty International is concerned about reports that Angel Zubchikov, a Rom, died after having been ill-treated in police custody. Similar incidents of ill-treatment have occurred repeatedly in Bulgaria and Amnesty International is concerned by what seems to have become a pattern of police violence and impunity. The organization is continuing to urge the Bulgarian authorities to take the problem very seriously, and to demonstrate its willingness to do so by initiating impartial investigations into allegations of ill-treatment, publishing the results and bringing to justice those responsible. Furthermore, the authorities should devise and implement effective training for police officers with special attention given to issues like human rights, racial tolerance and peaceful conflict resolution.

BACKGROUND:

On the morning of 29 January 1996, in the town of Razgrad, 17-year-old Angel Zubchikov was brought from the police lock-up to the hospital where he died. According to a police report he had been detained the previous night in a state of inebriation at a parking lot close to two cars which were involved in a traffic accident. Four hours after the arrest his health gravely deteriorated. An autopsy reportedly established that his death had resulted from a brain haemorrhage following a blow to the head. An investigation was initiated to determine how these injuries had been inflicted.

A press release from the Regional Directorate of Internal Affairs reportedly rejected claims that Angel Zubchikov had been beaten and stated that the injury was sustained prior to the arrest. There was no information, however, as to why the detainee had not been given adequate medical treatment if this had been the case.

Amnesty International raised this case in its report *Bulgaria : shootings, deaths in custody, torture and ill-treatment* (AI Index : EUR 15/07/96) published in June 1996. On 8 October 1996, Amnesty International received a letter from the Bulgarian Ministry for Foreign Affairs in which the case of Angel Zubchikov was mentioned among others. The letter stated that an investigation into Angel Zubchikov's death by the Military Prosecutor in Varna was still going on. It also described at length the police version of the events on the night of the 29 January, presenting this version as the factual one even though the judicial

investigation is still in progress. No information was given on how Angel Zubchikov had sustained the injuries he died from, although the letter claimed that the autopsy report stated that "he could not have been helped in any way and the lethal outcome could not have been prevented." All police officers involved stated that they had not used any physical violence on Angel Zubchikov. In a report, published in October 1996, *Bulgaria : Bulgarian authorities reply to June 1996 report* (AI Index: EUR 15/16/96), Amnesty International expressed concern that the authorities' comments on this case seem to be biased and urged them to inform the organization of the procedures and evidence on which these comments were based. Amnesty International also asked for a copy of the autopsy report.

According to the Human Rights Project, a local human rights organization working on behalf of Roma, the Razgrad police officers involved in the incident gave different accounts of what had happened before and after an investigation had been opened. They first alleged that Angel Zubchikov died on the street after he had fallen down while they were chasing him. Later they stated that he had been taken to the police station. Furthermore, when Angel Zubchikov's mother and stepfather took his body home on 30 January, they reportedly saw that he had bruising on the back, the right hand, the right thigh and the face as well as handcuff marks on his wrists. Imprints of boots were on his clothes.

Amnesty International urges the authorities to ensure that the investigation into the reported ill-treatment and death of Angel Zubchikov is thorough and impartial, to publicize the results of this investigation and to bring to justice anyone found guilty of having violated Angel Zubchikov's human rights.