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PUBLIC STATEMENT

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Traianos Pasois on trial for entering the country with two Macedonian wall calendars

Amnesty International will adopt Traianos Pasois, a member of the ethnic Macedonian minority party "Rainbow", as a prisoner of conscience and will call for his immediate and unconditional release should he be imprisoned after his trial in Florina today, the human rights organization said in a letter to the Greek Government.

On 17 February 1996 Traianos Pasois crossed the border between Greece and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, at the border post of Niki, Florina. According to an indictment later issued against him, he had in his possession "two wall calendars which he intended to circulate" and which "featured photographs of pure Greek towns and areas, under or next to which were captions written in a foreign idiom".

The indictment further states that the captions "praised clearly controversial and provocative actions and decisions by political parties, groups and organizations which took part in the civil war. [These] actions and decisions disputed the Greek character of [the province of] Macedonia, aiming at its dismemberment, secession and annexation by a neighbouring state then enemy of Greece". There is no evidence in the indictment to suggest that the calendars contained language amounting to an incitement to, or advocacy of, violence.

Amnesty International believes that the charge brought against Traianos Pasois is motivated by his public support for the recognition of a Macedonian minority in Greece, by his affirmation of membership of such a minority and by his support for the right to use, without restriction, the Macedonian language and disseminate views and opinions relating to the region.

The organization considers that by bringing Traianos Pasois to trial simply for expressing his opinion, the Greek authorities are acting in violation of Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and Article 10 of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (ECHR), both of which Greece has ratified and is therefore bound to observe.

Background:

On 14 October 1997 Vasilis Romas, Costas Tasopoulos, Petros Vasiliadis and Pavlos Voskopoulos, four other members of the "Rainbow" Party, stood trial in Florina for "causing and inciting mutual hatred among the citizens" and thus violating Article 192 of the Greek Penal Code by displaying a sign, with the words "Florina Committee" in both Greek and Macedonian, outside the Florina office of the Rainbow Party in September 1995. The indictment against the four men also stated that the use of the Macedonian words "*Lerinski Komitet*" "provoked and incited discord among the area's citizens [who] justifiably...identify these words with an old terrorist organization of Slavic-speaking alien nationals which was active in the area". The trial was postponed until September 1998.

Amnesty International believes that the charges brought against Traianos Pasaos and the other members of the "Rainbow" Party are motivated by their expression of public support for the recognition of a Macedonian minority in Greece and the affirmation of their membership of such a minority. The organization therefore considers the four men to be potential prisoners of conscience and will ask for their immediate and unconditional release should they be imprisoned. ENDS.../