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FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF YUGOSLAVIA: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL APPEALS AGAINST FORCIBLE CONSCRIPTIONS

The authorities of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia should stop the forcible return of men to Serbian-held areas of Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina for mobilization into Serbian armed forces, Amnesty International said today.

"These forcible mobilizations -- involving men born in Croatia or Bosnia-Herzegovina -- not only violate national and international law, but those returned also risk imprisonment or other human rights abuses if they refuse to serve in the Bosnian Serb armed forces," the human rights organization said.

Amnesty International is calling on the authorities to ensure that those who have already been forcibly mobilized are allowed to return to the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia at the earliest opportunity.

In a letter to the President of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia this week, Amnesty International said that registered refugees, as well as residents and even citizens of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia had been forcibly conscripted.

The organization noted that at least 2,000 men have reportedly been forcibly returned since 11 June 1995. Reports indicate that officers of Serbia's police forces and the Army of Yugoslavia cooperated in this action.

This situation apparently contradicts repeated denials by the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia of any military role in the conflict in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina since the withdrawal of the Yugoslav National Army from Bosnia-Herzegovina in May 1992.

Amnesty International recalled that the right of everyone to have conscientious objections to military service was recognized as a legitimate exercise of the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion by the United Nations Commission on Human Rights.

"Any individual should have the right to refuse to perform armed service or any other direct or indirect participation in wars or armed conflicts for reasons of conscience," Amnesty International said.

The manner in which these mobilizations had been carried out made it highly unlikely that any of those conscripted were given the opportunity to exercise their right to refuse to do military service on conscientious grounds, according to the human rights organization.

Amnesty International also noted that the forcible return of refugees to their country of origin is in breach of the principle of *non-refoulement*, as set out in Article 33 of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. This principle of *non-refoulement* is accepted as a rule of customary international law and is binding on all states in all cases without discrimination as to a refugee's country of origin or nationality.  
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