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## PUBLIC STATEMENT

### *Silencing of the messengers in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY)*

*Amnesty International today protested against the Serbian authorities' increasing repression of freedom of speech and called for all restrictions on the independent media reporting on the human rights situation in the FRY to be lifted immediately.*

*The organization reminded the Yugoslav Federal Government that its declaration last night of a state of "imminent danger of war" does not justify censorship of the media or the suspension of any human rights.*

*This morning's closing down by police of the main Belgrade independent radio station, B92, and detention of its editor for several hours, is only the last in a string of attempts by the authorities to restrict freedom of speech. Amnesty International does not accept the authorities' claim that the action was because of an infringement of B92's licence.*

*On 21 March, Koha Ditore, the only Kosovo Albanian-language daily newspaper still publishing, was given a huge fine, as was its editor. The paper now faces confiscation of its equipment, which effectively means closure. Last week two other Albanian language papers were forced to close after being given similar fines. The week before, three Serbian journalists of the paper Dnevni Telegraph were given prison sentences for criticizing a government minister.*

*A government decree passed in October 1998 banned several newspapers and the rebroadcast of foreign stations like the BBC, Voice of*

*America and Deutsche Welle. Serbia also passed a draconian Law on Information, allowing for enormous fines of up to 80,000 US dollars and giving limited opportunities for appeal.*

*The prosecution of Koha Ditore was based on charges of “inciting national hatred” under the Law on Information. The paper’s 19 March edition quoted a Kosovo Albanian delegate to the Kosovo peace talks who referred to the burning of villages and the killing, torturing and expulsion of ethnic Albanians by government forces.*

*A further quotation from the chief political representative of the Kosovo Liberation Army accused the government of “genocide” and called upon the Serbian people to distance itself from such policies. The combined fines against Koha Ditore and editor Baton Haxhiu amount to about 50,000 US dollars at the official exchange rate. The average monthly salary in the FRY is currently about 120 US dollars.*

*ENDS...\*