

AI INDEX: EUR 70/57/99

EMBARGOED UNTIL 1500 HRS GMT ON 12 MAY 1999

Kosovo: A decade of unheeded warnings -- a recipe for disaster

THE HAGUE -- The international community allowed the present human rights disaster in Kosovo to unfold by failing to act despite repeated warnings over the last decade, Amnesty International said today.

The statement came as the organization launched a two-volume collection of its documentation about human rights violations in Kosovo alongside today's discussions at the Hague Appeal for Peace conference. The collection provides a detailed picture of 10 years' of torture and ill-treatment, "disappearances" and killings in Kosovo, leading up to the military intervention by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in March 1999.

For more than a decade, Amnesty International has warned of an unfolding human rights crisis in Kosovo, said Pierre Sané, Amnesty International's Secretary General. "But the international community simply did not want to know and did not want to act. The people of Kosovo are now paying the price for their indifference."

In reaction to the recent G-8 Summit statement of principles for peace in Kosovo, Mr Sané protested the lack of any mention of bringing human rights perpetrators to justice nor giving any role to the International Criminal Tribunal for Former Yugoslavia, headquartered at The Hague.

"In agreeing and implementing any form of peace settlement, will the kind of human rights guarantees that could prevent a repetition of this tragic history be insisted upon?" asked Sané. "Will the regional and local human rights and democracy NGOs -- and other civil society actors whose voice and vision has too often been ignored in the past -- be guaranteed a seat at the negotiating table?"

In Volume One, which begins in 1989, Amnesty International provides a detailed picture of demonstrators in Kosovo being jailed without charge and put in isolation without contact with their lawyers or families. By 1991, the human rights organization criticized the police of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) for shooting and killing unarmed ethnic Albanians, as well as torturing and ill-treating them, and protested against unfair trials of political opponents and labour leaders.

Amnesty International offered further graphic evidence in 1993 and 1994 of police torture and ill-treatment, arbitrary arrest and unfair trials. It appealed to the international community to work together to monitor and protect human rights in the FRY, and especially Kosovo.

Volume Two contains 14 different documents issued in 1998 and 1999, documenting Kosovo's emerging human rights crisis and expressing concern about Serbian army attacks which deliberately or indiscriminately killed hundreds of civilians. It charts a pattern of systematic human rights violations repeated over many years, and points to the lack of effective redress for victims, which again fueled the anger and frustration that culminated in the present conflict.

Amnesty International also criticizes the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) for committing hundreds of politically motivated killings of civilians, prisoners and other defenceless people and for breaching the Geneva Conventions.

“Only by bringing to justice those who violate human rights and those who breach international humanitarian law, can we hope to avert future conflicts and ensure that a genuine culture of respect for human rights takes root in the region,” Pierre Sané said.

Amnesty International research staff are currently stationed in Macedonia and Albania, where they are documenting ongoing human rights violations.

ENDS.../

For more information about the launch of *Kosovo: A Decade of Unheeded Warnings*, please call Karen Buschman at Amnesty International press office in The Netherlands on mobile no (31) 622-10-99-64 or (31) 20-626-4436. To arrange an interview, or to receive copies of the document, please contact the International Secretariat press office in London, UK, on (44) 171-413-5566.