

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

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## **Macedonia: Amnesty International calls for investigation into police killings**

Amnesty International urges both the Macedonian authorities and the ethnic Albanian community in Macedonia to ensure respect for human rights following the killings by the police of six men on 7 November in the village of Brodec, in the Shipkovica region north of Tetovo, close to the border with Kosovo.

"Given the political tensions in the parliament between and amongst ethnic Albanian and Macedonian parties over the last year, including over the implementation of the Ohrid Agreement, the events of 7 November can precipitate a situation where there is a risk of human rights violations," said Nicola Duckworth, Director of Amnesty International's Europe and Central Asia Programme.

According to government information six men were killed, amongst them at least two ethnic Albanian men who had escaped from Dubrava prison in Kosovo during August, as well as other ethnic Albanians from Macedonia who were believed to be part of an armed opposition group. Five people, including one police officer, were reportedly injured.

The Operation "Mountain Storm", which reportedly aimed to apprehend the escaped men, started in the early hours of 7 November and concluded around midday. Special police units parachuted into the area around Brodec, followed by ground support. The armed group reportedly opened fire from a house in which they were hiding.

According to the Minister of the Interior, the police took every effort to protect the civilian population. However ethnic Albanian sources have alleged that a number of other civilians were killed or injured in the operation. The Democratic Union for Integration, an ethnic Albanian party in Macedonia which had formed part of the ruling coalition under the previous government, have alleged disproportionate use of force.

"The authorities had a duty to recapture the escaped men and to ensure the security of the people of Macedonia. However, this should be done without resorting to disproportionate use of force and without endangering the lives of civilians," Nicola Duckworth said.

"In order to assure the Macedonian public that law enforcement officers acted in accordance with international standards, the authorities must open an investigation into these killings."

Between 13 and 15 ethnic Albanians have reportedly been arrested, including people in Brodec believed to have provided support - allegedly including weapons - to the group. Others were arrested on 9 November, when police raided ethnic Albanian houses in Skopje, reportedly looking for weapons.

Amnesty International urges the authorities to ensure that all arrested people are treated in accordance with international standards, including that they are not subjected to torture or other ill-treatment, as has been the case in similar operations targeting the ethnic Albanian community and documented by the organization.

"At a moment when tensions in neighbouring Kosovo are rising over the failure to resolve its future, it is imperative that the Macedonian authorities do not violate human rights when trying to defuse the tension and ensure stability and security", Nicola Duckworth said.

### **Background**

Seven men, each convicted of serious offences, escaped from Dubrava prison in Kosovo in August, and had reportedly been hiding in the area north of Tetovo since their escape. Two had been recaptured and a third, Zhavit Morina, was shot dead on 1 November; another reportedly killed himself by detonating a hand grenade during the raid. The remaining men include Ljirim Jakupi, an ethnic Albanian from Bujanovac in southern Serbia, who is believed

to be still at large.

The six-month conflict in Macedonia in 2001 between the Macedonian authorities and armed ethnic Albanian groups was concluded by the Ohrid Framework Agreement, signed on 13 August 2001. This resulted in the introduction of legislation granting of increased rights to minority populations, including in particular ethnic Albanians, who form around a third of the country's population, and a new constitution which for the first time recognized Albanians, Roma and other ethnic groups in its preamble. Recently the failure of the governing coalition to implement provisions of the Ohrid Agreement has led to increased tensions in the parliament.

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