

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Public Statement

AI Index: EUR 59/002/2004 (Public)
News Service No: 204
16 August 2004

Moldova: School closures in self-proclaimed Dnestr Moldavian Republic violate right to freedom of expression

Amnesty International calls on the authorities of the self-proclaimed Dnestr Moldavian Republic (DMR) to respect the right to freedom of expression of pupils, parents and teachers of Moldovan language schools which use Latin script in the DMR.

Since the announcement by DMR authorities on 1 July that the schools would be closed parents, teachers and pupils have been peacefully protesting against the closure by occupying the schools.

On 9 August Grigorii Stratulat, the father of a pupil at Rîbnița school was sentenced to seven days administrative detention for resisting the closure of the school. He is currently being held in Rîbnița temporary holding facility.

On 29 July the school in Rîbnița was stormed and six parents were detained. They have completed sentences of seven days of administrative detention for disobedience towards the police and taking part in unsanctioned activities. There is a danger that they may be sentenced again.

The action of the DMR authorities has been widely condemned by the international community, for example on 22 July the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Permanent Council condemned the action and expressed their extreme concern over the situation created by the arbitrary actions of administration and law enforcement officials in Tiraspol. On 28 July Jan Petersen Chairman of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe also expressed concern about the closure of a Moldovan School in the DMR and stated that the closure of the schools was in conflict with European standards on human rights and minority rights.

Amnesty International is concerned that Grigorii Stratulat has been detained for the peaceful defence of his right to freedom of expression. The organization will consider anyone detained for peaceful protest to be a prisoner of conscience and as such should be immediately and unconditionally released.

Background

The mainly Russian and Ukrainian speaking DMR proclaimed its independence from Moldova in 1990, but it is not internationally recognized.

On 1 July 2004 the DMR authorities announced that they would close the Moldovan Latin script schools unless they complied with the DMR curriculum and taught the Cyrillic script. Parents, teachers and pupils have insisted on their right to use Moldovan in Latin script which is the official language of Moldova. They have been occupying the schools to prevent police from closing them down.

On 26 July the police sealed off a Moldovan language boarding school in Bender while some of the pupils were at a summer camp. Currently 80 orphans aged from eight to 15 years-old are living in tents on the school grounds and inside the building in an effort to stop police from closing the school. The OSCE and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) are bringing them food once a day despite initial resistance by the DMR authorities.