

PUBLIC

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Prisoner of Conscience

13 January 2004

**FORMER YUGOSLAV
REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA**

Zoran Vraniskovski (m), religious leader

Zoran Vraniskovski, also known as Bishop or Metropolitan Jovan, is currently detained on remand for 30 days following his arrests on 12 January. He has been charged with "causing national, racial or religious hate, discord and intolerance" under Article 319 of the Criminal Code. Amnesty International believes that the reason for his arrest and detention is due to his support for the ecclesiastical control of the Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC) over the Macedonian Orthodox Church (MOC) and considers him to be a prisoner of conscience.

Prior to this he had been arrested on 11 January along with 12 others while celebrating a religious service in his private apartment in town of Bitola. The twelve were subsequently released though Zoran Vraniskovski was held for 24 hours and then released on 12 January, before being re-arrested on the same day.

Zoran Vraniskovski was formerly Bishop Jovan within the MOC. In May 2002, the SOC drafted a proposal which would have put the MOC under its control. Zoran Vraniskovski publicly accepted these terms on 29 June 2002, a move welcomed by most other national Orthodox Churches. However, he was stripped of his title in July 2002 by the MOC, denounced as a "traitor" and banned from conducting any religious activities in churches in Macedonia. Many Macedonians see his stance as challenging Macedonian nationhood, and his actions provoked a storm of controversy.

During this period Zoran Vraniskovski had locked himself in his official residence and refused to leave until local police forced an entry - an action he denounced. Under the Macedonian Constitution church and state are separate. The SOC subsequently appointed him as Metropolitan Jovan of a parallel Orthodox church organization within the SOC in Macedonia. On 10 January 2004, Zoran Vraniskovski announced an agreement on canonical unity with a number of Macedonian Orthodox institutions. The MOC immediately expelled those who had supported this agreement. Zoran Vraniskovski and 12 of these expellees were arrested the following day in his apartment.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The MOC was set up in 1967 with the backing of the then-Communist authorities when it unilaterally declared itself to be a separate Orthodox Church. The setting up of the MOC was an important landmark in modern Macedonian national history. Previously, the church had enjoyed autonomous status within the SOC which continues to claim ecclesiastical jurisdiction over Orthodox believers in Macedonia, and ownership of pre-1967 MOC property.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in English or your own language:

- stating that Amnesty International believes Zoran Vraniskovski to be a prisoner of conscience detained for his non-violent conscientiously held beliefs;
- calling for his immediate and unconditional release and for all criminal charges against him to be dropped.

APPEALS TO:

Minister of Justice

Ixhet Memeti

Minister za Pravda

Dimitrie Chupovski 9,

1000 Skopje, Macedonia

Telegram: Minister of Justice, Ixhet Memeti, Skopje, Macedonia

Fax: +389 23 226 975 (if someone answers, state in English, that you wish to send a fax and they will connect the machine)

Salutation: Dear Minister of Justice

COPIES TO:

Minister of Internal Affairs

Hari Kostov

Minister za vnatreshni raboti

Dimche Mirchev bb

1000 Skopje, Macedonia

Telegram: Minister of Internal Affairs, Hari Kostov, Skopje, Macedonia

Fax: +389 23 112 468

Salutation: Dear Minister of Internal Affairs

Head of the Human Rights Unit at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Bijana Stefanovska-Sekovska

Dame Gruev 6

1000 Skopje, Macedonia

Telegram: Head of Human Rights Unit, Bijana Stefanovska-Sekovska, Skopje, Macedonia

Fax: +389 23 115 790

E-mail: stefanovska@mfa.gov.mk

Salutation: Dear Madam

and to diplomatic representatives of Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 24 February 2004.