

29 May 1996

Further information on EXTRA 74/96 (EUR 11/12/96, 21 May 1996) - Arbitrary Detention / Ill-treatment

ALBANIA **Blendi Gonxhe, Arben Imami, Gramoz Pashko, Sërvet Pëllumbi, Namik Dokle, Arta Deda (f), Musa Ulqini, Ali Lelaj, Luan Hajdaraga, Gafo Apostolli, Paskal Milo, Maço Lakrori, Sphresa Sula (f), Neritan Çeka, Skënder Gjinushi and other leaders, activists and supporters of opposition parties, and journalists**

The elections for the Albanian parliament were held on 26 May 1996. Many of the opposition parties announced that they were pulling out of the election some three hours before the close of the poll. They alleged that voters had been intimidated, that opposition supporters had been beaten in several cases and that other irregularities had occurred in the polling. Although official results of the poll have not yet been issued, the Democratic Party (DP) has claimed that it has won an overwhelming victory. DP leaders have alleged that their supporters had been threatened in some cases. A reported statement of the preliminary findings of election monitors of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) confirmed that there had been irregularities in the ballot and intimidation of voters.

The leading opposition parties, including the Socialist Party (SP), the Democratic Alliance (DA) and the Social-Democratic Party (SDP), announced on 27 May that they would not recognize the results of the elections and that their candidates, where successful, would not be taking up their seats in the parliament. They also announced that they would not be taking part in second-round voting scheduled for 2 June, and called for their supporters to assemble at the main square, Skanderbeg square, in the centre of the capital, Tirana, on 28 May at 12 noon.

The police refused permission for the demonstration. At around 12 noon a procession of around 200 people, including leaders of the SP, DA and SDP set off from the SP headquarters, reportedly to seek a meeting with the OSCE election monitors at their hotel. The walk would have taken them across Skanderbeg square. Soon after they set off, police reportedly set about dispersing the procession and beat and detained many of the members of the group. Dozens of people in the group and some bystanders were beaten by police and a number were taken of by police into detention. Among those who were beaten were Neritan Çeka, Blendi Gonxhe, Arben Imami and Gramoz Pashko (all of the DA), Sërvet Pëllumbi, Namik Dokle, Arta Deda (f), Musa Ulqini, Ali Lelaj and Luan Hajdaraga (all of the SP) and Skënder Gjinushi, Gafo Apostolli and Paskal Milo (all of the SDP) and Shpresa Sula (affiliation unknown). Some of these and others who were briefly detained were held at police station number 2.

Arben Imami, one of the leaders of the DA who was in the group, stated that he was beaten severely after being pushed into a car (which bore no licence plates) and kept out of sight of the crowd. He was beaten about the back in the car before being taken to the headquarters of the National Intelligence Service (SHIK) where he was badly beaten about the head and body by three officers before being transferred to police station number 2. One or two other people, including a journalist, were reported to have been taken to

the SHIK building, although it is not known whether they have been released.

Separate from the main group and near the SP headquarters a witness saw, Maço Lakrori, an SP Member of Parliament, being beaten about the back and chest with five or six truncheon blows and kicks to the legs.

On or around Skanderbeg square, a large number of people had assembled. They were shouting slogans against the President and the DP, but there are no reports that they behaved violently. Around noon riot police and regular police also started to disperse those people who had come to the area. Tear gas was also reportedly used by the police. There were reportedly numerous beatings by police on or around the square.

As well as opposition supporters, by-standers were also targeted either near the SP headquarters or on the square. These included an Albanian photographer working for the Associated Press agency, who was briefly detained, and a Yugoslav journalist, both of whom were beaten.

The atmosphere apparently remains very tense in Tirana and other towns and it is possible that there will be further confrontations between police and opposition supporters. There are reports that one or more of the opposition leaders will be prosecuted for organizing an illegal meeting.

FURTHER RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express/airmail letters in Italian, English, French or in your own language:

- expressing concern about reports of the beating and detention of opposition leaders, supporters and journalists around Skanderbeg square and the Socialist Party headquarters in Tirana on 28 May 1996;
- noting that the reports follow what appears to have been a clear pattern of harassment of the opposition during the election period;
- pointing out that such incidents violate provisions of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which guarantee freedom of expression and association and bans arbitrary detention and torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment;
- urging that police officers and all law-enforcement officials be required to respect Albania's international human rights commitments and that those who fail to do so be duly disciplined or brought to justice.

APPEALS TO:

President of Albania

Dr Sali Berisha
President i Republikës
se Shqipërisë
Tirana, Albania

Faxes: +355 42 33761

Telegrams: President Berisha, Tirana, Albania

Salutation: Dear President

Minister of Public Order

Mr Agron Musaraj
Minister i Rendit Publik
Tirana, Albania

Telegrams: Minister i Rendit Publik, Tirana, Albania

Salutation: Dear Minister

COPIES TO:Minister of Foreign Affairs

Dr Alfred Serreqi
Minister i Punëve të Jashtme
Tirana, Albania

The Albanian Helsinki Committee

Komiteti Shqiptar i Helsinkit
Qendra Nderkombetare e kultures, Dhoma no.35
Bulevardi "Deshmoret e kombit"
Tirana, Albania

and to diplomatic representatives of Albania accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 30 June 1996.