

6 February 1996

Further information (1) on EXTRA 147/95 (EUR 64/13/95, 24 November 1995) -
Fear of refoulement / Ill-treatment

CROATIA Muslim refugees in Kuplensko

Amnesty International continues to be concerned about the *refoulement* of refugees and the reported ill-treatment by police of some of the Muslim refugees from Bosnia-Herzegovina who are in a collection centre around Kuplensko, south of Vojnif in Croatia.

On 1 February 1995, Croatian police arrested 69 Muslim refugees in the Kuplensko camp in a crackdown for alleged tax irregularities in the *ad hoc* businesses such as vendors, hairdressers, and a telephone centre which have established themselves in the camp. One man was reportedly handcuffed to a post and beaten by a special police officer during the operation because weapons were allegedly found in his possession. International organizations, including the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), were initially excluded from the camp during the operation although Croatian television was allowed to film. The police reportedly claimed that the justification for the arrests was the failure of these businesses to pay tax to which they should have been liable. Humanitarian organizations involved with the camp have pointed out that the *ad hoc* businesses contributed to improving the primitive conditions in the camp, which may have been the real reason why they were targeted.

Twenty men were reportedly released later the same day and returned to the camp in Kuplensko while 46 others were forcibly returned to Velika Kladuša in Bosnia-Herzegovina on 2 February 1995. Two people remain in detention.

Amnesty International opposes the *refoulement* of refugees to areas where they are at risk of human rights violations. The organization is particularly concerned about reports of the ill-treatment or harassment of Kuplensko refugees returned to the Velika Kladuša area of Bosnia-Herzegovina (see EXTRA 11/96, EUR 63/05/96, 30 January 1995).

Responses from the Croatian Ministry of the Interior to Amnesty International members' earlier appeals have failed to answer the organization's concerns about past reports of *refoulement* or ill-treatment.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

A program of voluntary return of the refugees under UNHCR began several months ago, and approximately 8,000 refugees remain in the Kuplensko camp. Conditions in the refugee camp are extremely primitive, with many refugees accommodated in tents despite winter weather. The humanitarian organization *Médecins Sans Frontières* (MSF) has protested that Croatian authorities are applying continuous but varied pressure to persuade refugees to return to Bosnia-Herzegovina, including tight security controls, restrictions on visitors, and a ban on the import of consumer goods into the camp. MSF also noted that the government has placed restrictions on the types of humanitarian aid allowed and has prevented materials for protecting the refugees from winter conditions from being brought into the camp. Such obstacles have apparently been used to

discourage refugees from remaining in Croatia, despite the fact that conditions may be unsafe for them in Velika Kladuša.

FURTHER RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send urgent appeals in English, German, French or in your own language:

- stating that you are aware that the Croatian authorities are still forcibly returning Muslim refugees from the Velika Kladuša area currently in the Kuplensko area to Bosnia-Herzegovina and that there are reports that some of the detainees were beaten by Croatian Special Police officers;
- noting that some refugees returned to Bosnia-Herzegovina from Croatia have recently suffered serious human rights violations including ill-treatment;
- stating that Amnesty International takes no position on whether any of those recently arrested and/or forcibly returned may have committed criminal offences;
- stressing that the *refoulement* of any individuals to countries where they may be at risk of serious human rights abuses on the basis of alleged misdemeanours is contrary to the spirit and intention of the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, to which Croatia is a party;
- expressing fears that the authorities are preparing to put more pressure on the refugees to return to Bosnia-Herzegovina or forcibly return individuals;
- demanding assurances that no individuals will be forcibly returned to Bosnia-Herzegovina without an individual procedure to determine the risk of human rights abuses which each person may face if returned;
- calling for the full cooperation of the Croatian authorities with international agencies seeking to improve conditions for refugees around Kuplensko so as to help to ensure that all returns are voluntary;
- calling for action to be taken to ensure that refugees are not ill-treated by Special Police or other officers.

APPEALS TO:

Minister of Internal Affairs

Mr Ivan Jarnjak

Ministar

Ministarstvo za unutrašnje poslove Republike Hrvatske

Savska cesta 39

11000 Zagreb, CROATIA

Telegrams: Ministar za unutrašnje poslove, Zagreb, Croatia

Faxes: +385 1 443 715

Salutation: Dear Minister

Deputy-Premier - Responsible for humanitarian affairs

Dr Ivica Kostović

Zamjenik Predsjednika vlade Republike Hrvatske

Trg Stjepana Radića 7

10000 Zagreb, CROATIA

Faxes: +385 1 4550 284

Salutation: Dear Minister

Government Office for Refugees and Displaced Persons [ODPR]

Dr Adalbert Rebić

Ured za prognanike i izbjeglice pri vladi RH

Ul. Republike Austrije 14

10000 Zagreb, CROATIA

Faxes: +385 1 172 109

Salutation: Dear Dr Rebi**f**

Adviser to the President on humanitarian affairs

Dr Slobodan Lang

Savjetnik Predsednika

Pantov...ak 241

10000 Zagreb, CROATIA

Faxes: +385 1 444 666

Salutation: Dear Dr Lang

COPIES TO: diplomatic representatives of Croatia accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 6 March 1996.