

EXTERNAL

AI Index: EUR 64/10/96

EXTRA 78/96

Ill-treatment / Health concern /  
Conscientious Objection

23 May 1996

CROATIA

Nikša Violif, aged 20

---

Nikša Violif, who was allegedly severely beaten by military police in Split on 16 and 17 May 1996, is reportedly now in the Firula hospital in Split. Amnesty International fears that the army may be putting pressure on the hospital to allow his discharge and return to military police custody where he could face further ill-treatment.

Nikša Violif, who is a Jehovah's Witness, received call-up papers for the Croatian Army on 14 May telling him to report for duty at the barracks in Sinj the next day. He reported to the base but refused to carry arms because of his religious convictions. He was detained by military police of the 72nd Battalion and taken to the Lora military compound in Split. On 16 and 17 May he was allegedly beaten so severely by military police officers that on 18 May he was transferred to Firula hospital, reportedly in a coma.

Also on 18 May, the local newspaper, *Slobodna Dalmacija*, reported that he had been charged with "refusing to accept and use arms" and that an early trial had been scheduled. Nikša Violif is now conscious and is allegedly under pressure to sign certain documents by the army. Amnesty International is concerned that if true, this may prejudice his chances of defending himself at his reported forthcoming trial. If he is imprisoned as a result of his conscientious objections to performing military service, Amnesty International will consider him to be a prisoner of conscience.

#### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Military service is compulsory in Croatia for all men aged between 16 and 60 years. The normal period of military service is 10 months, although the armed conflict in the country has meant that many men have been called up from the reserves to go on active duty. There is alternative military service for those who object on conscientious grounds, although this is not purely civilian in character and does not conform fully with international standards such as those set out by the Council of Europe.

In practice there are difficulties even for those who wish to perform the alternative service because recruits who submit requests to perform the alternative service can be called up while their requests are being considered.

"Refusing to accept and use arms" in military service in Croatia carries a penalty of up to 10 years' imprisonment under the Croatian criminal code.

Military police in the Lora compound in Split have in the past been responsible for serious beatings of detainees. In 1992 at least three men died as a result of such beatings at the base. More recently, military police have participated in the ill-treatment of civilians in the course of evictions from apartments owned by the Ministry of Defence in Dalmatia.

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

- expressing concern about reports that Nikša Violif was severely beaten by military police at the Lora base in Split on or around 16 May 1996;
- demanding assurances that he will be allowed time for any necessary hospital treatment and recuperation and will not be further ill-treated if and when he is returned to a military police detention centre;
- calling for a thorough, independent and impartial investigation into reports of his ill-treatment and for anyone found responsible to be brought to justice;

**if possible also:**

- ask for clarification of the circumstances in which Nikša Violif was called up and reports that he has refused to take up arms or perform military service;
- stating that conscientious objection to military service is a recognized as a right by international organizations such as the Council of Europe and that Amnesty International will consider Nikša Violif to be a prisoner of conscience if he is imprisoned as a result of his conscientious objection.

**APPEALS TO:**

(Commander of the Military Police at Lora base)  
Zapovjednik Vojne Policije  
Kasarna Lora  
21000 Split  
Croatia

**Faxes: +385 21 361 708**

**Telegrams: Zapovjednik Vojne Policije, Split, Croatia**

**Salutation: Dear Commander**

(Commander of military police of Republic of Croatia)  
Brigadier Mato Laušif  
Uprava Vojne Policije  
Ministarstvo za narodnu obranu Republike Hrvatske  
Trg Kralja Krešimira IV 1  
10000 Zagreb

**Faxes: +385 1 456 7022**

**Telegrams: Zapovjednik Vojne Policije, MNO, Zagreb, Croatia**

**Salutation: Dear Brigadier**

(Minister of Defence)  
Mr Gojko Šušak  
Ministarstvo za narodnu obranu Republike Hrvatske  
Trg Kralja Krešimira IV 1  
10000 Zagreb  
Croatia

**Faxes: +385 1 432 415**

**Telegrams: Ministar za narodnu obranu, Zagreb, Croatia**

**Salutation: Dear Minister**

**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 20 June 1996.