

EXTERNAL

AI Index: EUR 64/11/96

UA 154/96 Fear for safety / Fear of ill-treatment

26 June 1996

CROATIA Frane Gugo and Damir Bumber, Boško Šimif, Ivan Velif, Jurica Babif, Senka Bule, Andrija Šimif, Slavka Mari...if, Marija Jelen...if, Nataša Marif, Ana Šimif, Marija Jelif, Marija Goleš, their families, and others.

Amnesty International is concerned for the safety of scores of people living in apartments previously owned by the former Yugoslav National Army (JNA) in Split, who are believed to be at risk of imminent violent eviction from their apartments. On the occasion of similar evictions in the past, civilian and military police in Croatia have refused to intervene to protect civilians from violence and intimidation, and the authorities have made available information about the tenants of such apartments to the perpetrators.

On Monday 17 June 1996, the Gugo family was forcibly evicted from their apartment in Split by a group of three men dressed in civilian clothing and reportedly presenting themselves as members of the military housing committee in Split. The men threatened human rights observers who were present in the apartment at the time and eventually forced them to leave. Semina Lon...ar, president of the Split branch of the Committee for Human Rights, reports that one of the men, with a motion of an axe he was carrying, threatened to strike her in the head. After the human rights observers had left, Frane Gugo was reportedly hit about the head and his wife was dragged along the floor by her hands causing bruising.

Military police were called to the scene, but refused to intervene on the grounds that civilians, rather than soldiers, were involved. The civilian police also reportedly refused to offer protection although their reasons were less clear. In other violent evictions from military apartments which have occurred in the past, civilian police have refused to intervene on the grounds that the perpetrators were soldiers and only the military police were competent.

The leader of the group which carried out the eviction of the Gugo family is believed to be president of an association of Croatian war veterans from the recent conflict in Croatia, and was in possession of a list of other families who may be threatened with eviction. The list reportedly comprises up to 28 addresses of tenants of military apartments, including personal information about the tenants - date of birth, number of children, occupation and so on. These tenants, like the Gugos, have in the past exchanged tenancies of other apartments in the town of Knin, which was formerly under rebel-Serb control, for the military-owned apartments in Split (for further information about this kind of eviction, see EUR 64/12/95, *Croatia: Violent Evictions by Uniformed Personnel...*). They are now reportedly afraid to leave their apartments for fear that they will be broken into in their absence.

Amnesty International fears that other violent evictions may occur and calls on the civilian and military authorities and police to act to protect the potential victims from acts of violence. On the basis of the Gugos' and other cases, the organization is concerned that authorities have encouraged violent evictions of this kind by providing details of tenants and by failing to provide adequate civilian or military police protection.

Amnesty International takes no position on the legality of these evictions. It is, however, concerned that little or no restraint appears to have been placed upon military personnel who have reportedly carried out many such evictions. Indeed, in many cases, members of the military seemingly abuse their authority to force the tenants to leave. Many such evictions have taken place without warning and sometimes at unusual times of the day or night, further intimidating the victims. Amnesty International also notes that the perpetrators seem to rely on the non-interference of the military and civilian police and may therefore be encouraged to use threats or violence to carry out the evictions.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The armed forces have become heroes to much of the Croatian mainstream population, particularly after the military offensive in August 1995, in which the Croatian armed forces took the Krajina, a large territory of Croatia which had formerly been held by Croatian Serbs opposed to rule from Zagreb. Since in the past few Croatian Army soldiers who used violence to evict civilians from their apartments were punished and since the vast majority of soldiers retained tenancy in the apartments, members and former members of the Croatian Army seem to be using their enhanced status to resolve their housing needs by resorting to violence. Many seem to have the approval of the Ministry of Defence for their actions, and are able to produce documents assigning them the apartment in question before any legal procedure has begun to take away tenancy of the existing inhabitants. In other cases the Ministry of Defence has issued documents allowing the perpetrators to remain in the apartments after they have violently evicted the previous tenants.

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

- reminding the authorities that civilian and military police have a duty to protect civilians, and expressing concern that during the eviction of Frane Gugo on 17 June 1996 neither civilian nor military police intervened;
- in particular, asking why the civilian police failed to respond after military police had failed to do so on the grounds that the perpetrators were civilians rather than soldiers;
- expressing concern that civilian and military police inaction concerning such violence may be interpreted as officially condoning and even encouraging such practices to continue;
- stating that Amnesty International is concerned that other similar violent evictions may be being planned in the Split area and calling for steps to be taken to protect individuals from violence.

APPEALS TO:

Commissioner of Police, Split County

Mr Ivan Cipci

Na...elnik policije Splitsko-Dalmatinsk ōupanije

MUP, 21000 Split, Croatia

Fax: +385 21 307 370

Telegrams: Police Commissioner Cipci, Split, Croatia

Salutation: Dear Commissioner Cipci

Commander-in-Chief, 72nd Battalion of the Military Police

Mihail Budimir

Zapovijednik 72. bojne vojne policije
Lora Barracks
21000 Split, Croatia
Telegrams: Military Police Commander 72 Batt, Split, Croatia
Salutation: Dear Commander Budimir

Minister of Defence

Mr Gojko Šušak
Ministarstvo za narodnu obranu Republike Hrvatske
Trg Kralja Krešimira IV 1
10000 Zagreb, Croatia
Fax: +385 1 432 415
Telegrams: Defence Minister Šušak, 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 7 August 1996.