

10 August 2001

AI Index EUR 65/004/2001 - News Service Nr. 141

Macedonia: Amnesty International appeals to all parties to protect civilian populations

Amnesty International is concerned at the massive increase in human rights violations in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (Macedonia), despite the government's announcement on 7 August that a peace agreement would be signed by all political parties on 13 August.

Since the announcement, there have been daily reports of violations, including extrajudicial killings, by the Macedonian police forces, while the ethnic Albanian National Liberation Army (NLA) has reportedly abducted and ill-treated civilians, some of whom are being held hostage.

"All parties involved should respect international human rights and abide by their obligation to respect the Geneva conventions, which forbid the murder and torture of civilians, and the taking of hostages," said Amnesty International.

On 7 August, according to credible reports received by Amnesty International, extrajudicial executions took place when Macedonian police killed two ethnic Albanians and three Albanian nationals in a raid on a house in Skopje and detained five others, alleging that they were preparing a terrorist attack.

In retaliation, the NLA abducted five civilian construction-workers -- four Macedonians and one Rom -- on the same day. The five were released the following day. They alleged they had been ill-treated by the NLA. On 9 August the NLA reportedly abducted another six Macedonian civilians from a village near Tetovo.

After ten Macedonian soldiers were killed, reportedly by the NLA, in an ambush near Tetovo on 8 August, the fighting between the NLA and the Macedonian security forces in Tetovo intensified. Amnesty International is concerned about the reported killing of two ethnic Albanian civilians during these clashes. The organization is further concerned about reports from the Tetovo hospital that a three-year-old Macedonian girl and her father were injured in the fighting.

Background

Following the death of the 10 soldiers on 8 August, in Prilep, the soldiers' home-town, shops owned by Muslims - including Turks, Roma and Bosniaks - were looted, and the mosque was burned to the ground, reportedly by crowds of Macedonian men in revenge for the death of the soldiers. In Skopje, on the same day, several hundred Macedonian Slavs allegedly looted Albanian shops in protest against the announcement of the peace agreement. Amnesty International calls on the Macedonian authorities to conduct prompt and impartial investigations, and to ensure that the perpetrators are brought to justice. Amnesty International also recommends that the police and

judicial authorities in Macedonia exercise due diligence to prevent ethnically motivated violence. The authorities should also make clear that such violence is a criminal offence and will not be tolerated.

Despite negotiations and cease-fire agreements, clashes continue between the ethnic Albanian National Liberation Army (NLA) and the Macedonian police and military forces. The NLA claims that its aims are to secure the political, social and economic rights of ethnic Albanians in Macedonia, who make up between a quarter and a third of the country's population. Since the first clashes between the NLA and Macedonian police in January 2001, fighting has taken place in the villages of the Shar mountains to the north of the predominantly Albanian town of Tetovo in the west of Macedonia, and around Kumanovo in the north of the country near the border with Kosovo.

The violence continued even after the formation of a government of national unity in May, which includes the main Macedonian and ethnic Albanian parties. In June, the European Union and the United States appointed special envoys to facilitate talks between Macedonian Slavs and ethnic Albanian parties. On 5 July a cease-fire was agreed between the Macedonian security forces and the NLA, and the dialogue between the political parties continued. This cease-fire has been breached constantly during the peace negotiations, but, after many setbacks, the political parties agreed that they would sign the peace agreement on 13 August.

\ENDS

public document

For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566

Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW web : <http://www.amnesty.org>