

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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Albania: Break the cycle of deprivation

On the 20th anniversary of the adoption by the UN General Assembly of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Amnesty International calls on the Albanian authorities to ensure that children are not placed in orphanages unnecessarily.

Amnesty International is concerned that poverty remains one of the main reasons for the placement of children in orphanages in Albania. Many of these children have a parent or other close relatives, but their families cannot afford to support them. The organization is calling on the government to provide greater assistance and support to such families, so that they may raise their children within the family.

In a memorandum sent this week to the President of Albania and the Albanian government the organization writes: "There are children in residential care today whose best interests would be served by remaining in their families, and who have a parent or other close relatives who would care for them if adequate economic assistance and other support were available". These children are being denied their right to family life.

Amnesty International is also concerned that there is inadequate individual care, supervision and follow-up for orphans and other children without parental care leaving state Children's Homes. In particular, those sent to vocational boarding schools do not receive appropriate state protection and assistance up the age of majority (18 years) as is their right, under national and international law. As a result, many drop out of school, and do not acquire the skills and qualifications that would enable them to live independently. As adults they are likely to be homeless, and to be at risk of extreme poverty and social exclusion. Amnesty International again calls on the Albanian authorities to implement the right of orphans to priority with housing and employment, as required under national law.

The UN General Assembly's Third Committee is expected to adopt Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children today [20 November]. These Guidelines are intended, among other things, to: "*Assist and encourage governments to better implement their responsibilities...*" and: "*Guide policies, decisions and activities of all concerned with social protection and child welfare in both the public and private sectors, including civil society*".

Amnesty International welcomes these Guidelines, which state that: "*Children should be placed in alternative care only in last resort, when this is in their best interests, and where possible, temporarily*". They also state that "*Financial and material poverty, or conditions directly and uniquely imputable to such poverty, should never be the only justification for the removal of a child from parental care.*"

The Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children also call for educational and vocational opportunities for young people leaving care to help them become financially independent, as well as access to social, legal and health services, together with appropriate financial support for young

people leaving care and during aftercare. But in addition to these services, the Guidelines recognize the need of the child or young person for individual support, and require *“special efforts to be made to allocate to each child, whenever possible, a specialized person who can facilitate his/her independence when leaving care”*.

Background

The Albanian government has already taken some legislative and other measures to improve the protection of children in alternative care, but their practical effect has so far been limited. While draft amendments to the law “On Social Assistance and Services” are currently under consideration, which will reportedly benefit some categories of orphans, it remains to be seen whether these will be effective in reducing the number of children placed in alternative care.

In the Memorandum sent to the Albanian authorities, Amnesty International calls for further measures, based on the Guidelines, to ensure that fewer children are taken into care, that families at risk of relinquishing their children are supported, and that as young people make the transition to independence they receive the individual support and guidance they need.

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