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ALBANIA: POLICE MISCONDUCT REWARDED WITH IMPUNITY

Amnesty International has called on the Albanian Government to honour its human rights commitments under national and international law.

In its most recent report, the organization expresses its concern about frequent reports in the past year of police beating, kicking or otherwise ill-treating people during arrest or detention. Victims are frequently reported to have suffered injuries, such as severe bruising, broken teeth or cuts, which have necessitated medical treatment or even admission to hospital.

"In certain cases the ill-treatment has been so severe that it has amounted to torture. In at least five cases the victim died, apparently as a result of the injuries they suffered," Amnesty International said.

Many of these violations have been directed against members or supporters of the Socialist Party (SP) -- the renamed communist party and now the country's main opposition party. However, other victims have also included protesting former political prisoners, villagers, workers, members of the Greek minority and homosexuals. There have also been frequent reports of police ill-treating detainees in the course of routine law-enforcement duties.

Amnesty International is concerned that the prosecution of police officers for the torture or ill-treatment of detainees is rare - except in cases where the victim has died. Even in these cases, the available information suggests that the investigations have not been prompt, thorough and impartial, as required by international human rights treaties ratified by Albania. In general, police misconduct appears to enjoy a high degree of impunity.

The Amnesty International report highlights a number of illustrative cases of police ill-treatment, including three in which the victim died. The organization also makes a series of recommendations to ensure that Albania's obligations under international human rights treaties are respected.

"The Albanian authorities must implement an effective complaints mechanism for people who consider they have been ill-treated by the police. Complaints should be promptly and impartially investigated and the officers responsible must be brought to justice," Amnesty International said.

The organizations also asks for the Albanian authorities to provide compensation to victims and to ensure that police officers receive adequate training in international human rights standards for law enforcement.

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