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ALBANIA: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL CALLS ON THE ALBANIAN AUTHORITIES TO BRING TO JUSTICE THOSE RESPONSIBLE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

Those responsible for the arrest and ill-treatment of the opposition activists and supporters before and shortly after the Albanian national elections in May 1996 should be brought to justice, Amnesty International said in a report released today.

“With the local elections little more than a month away (20 October) the Albanian authorities should bear in mind that all citizens should have the freedom to express their views and to hold peaceful demonstrations,” Amnesty International said. These rights are guaranteed under their Constitution as well as international treaties ratified by the state.

On 28 May, two days after the the ruling Democratic Party’s overwhelming victory, opposition parties attempted to hold a protest demonstration. They claimed there had been major election fraud, echoing criticism by international observers about the way the election had been conducted.

The authorities banned the demonstration and police violently dispersed the crowd. Many demonstrators were beaten by police, including opposition leaders, women and the elderly, as well as some bystanders and local and foreign journalists. Dozens of demonstrators were arrested and some of them were further ill-treated in detention before being released.

“Such action fits a pattern of official persecution of opposition leaders and supporters and of the independent or opposition press in recent years,” Amnesty International said. This grew worse in the run-up to the May 1996 elections and their immediate aftermath.

“Despite official promises of investigations into the activities of those police officers involved, the authorities so far have taken little action, apart from dismissing seven police officers for ‘incompetence’”.

Investigations into police violence by the Prosecutor’s Office and by a parliamentary commission are still under way. By contrast, court proceedings against 10 men accused of taking part in the unauthorized demonstration were concluded in July.

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For more information, or for a copy of the report entitled *Albania: detention and ill-treatment of government opponents - the elections of May 1996* (AI Index: EUR 11/17/96) please contact Amnesty International’s International Secretariat.