

12 February 1996

£BULGARIA

@Alleged ill-treatment by Bulgarian special police forces in the *Druzhiba* quarter and *Rakovski* stadium in Sofia

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL'S CONCERN:

Amnesty International is concerned about reports that members of the Bulgarian special police forces dealing with organized crime ill-treated people in their custody while carrying out two raids in the Bulgarian capital Sofia on 23 November 1995. The special forces rushed into a cafe in the *Druzhiba* quarter, chased everyone out and then kicked people in the street and beat them with electric batons. Two hours later the special forces carried out another raid near the *Rakovski* football stadium, and allegedly ill-treated several other people. Around 20 people who had been ill-treated during these raids had to seek medical treatment and six of them had to be hospitalized and underwent emergency operations.

Such incidents of ill-treatment have occurred repeatedly in Bulgaria over the last couple of years and Amnesty International is extremely concerned by what seems to have become a pattern of police violence. The organization is continuing to urge the Bulgarian authorities to take the problem very seriously, and to demonstrate its willingness to do so by initiating impartial and prompt investigations into allegations of ill-treatment, to publish the results and to bring to justice those responsible. Furthermore, the authorities should devise and implement effective training for police officers with special attention given to issues like human rights, racial tolerance and peaceful conflict resolution.

BACKGROUND:

The information on this case comes from reports in the Bulgarian daily *Standart*. According to these reports, on 23 November 1995, at around 11am a group of around 20 police officers belonging to the Bulgarian special police forces, the so called Red Berets (*Cherveny barety*) performed a raid on a cafe in Block 108 in the *Druzhiba* district in Sofia. It transpired later that the police were looking for the manager of a private security firm, whom they suspected of being involved in organized crime.

Eye-witnesses to the raid said that all police officers were masked, some wore uniforms, others were plainclothed and only two or three of them wore flakjackets with the insignia "police" on them. They were armed with revolvers, automatic Kalashnikovs and electric batons. Four Red Berets stormed into the cafe, and, without having asked to see people's identification papers, ordered everyone inside to go out at gunpoint, while the others blocked off the surrounding streets. They then started to kick them and beat them with their

batons on their heads and bodies. People witnessing the incident from a nearby block and bus stop state that the beatings went on for about 15 minutes. Then the Red Berets packed them in their cars and drove them to the *Pirogov* hospital. It turned out that only one of the victims was employed by a private security firm which could be suspected of having connections with organized crime. The other victims were reportedly local people who happened to be in the cafe. Six of the victims were so badly injured that they had to stay in hospital and undergo emergency operations. One of them, 33-year-old Konstantin Kaldurumov, suffered a cracked skull and other fractures on his arms and legs. Miko Tsanev, another victim, had to be given emergency resuscitation twice. He was still in hospital ten days after the incident where he had to be operated on twice because of massive abdominal internal bleeding, and needed further urgent operations on injuries to his arms. Twenty-seven-year-old Georgi Rusinov, who works as a shop-assistant in the *Despred* company had his arm broken. Other victims of the beatings had to undergo medical treatment for broken limbs, ribs and bruising.

Two hours after the first raid, the same units of the Red Berets were reportedly involved in another action, this time near the *Rakovski* football stadium in Sofia. It turned out that the police were looking for Dimitur Dimitrov, the manager of a private security firm suspected of having stolen identity cards, arms and a Mercedes car from the police a week earlier.

Dimitrov and around six of his men were just leaving their offices by car when some masked plainclothes police officers appeared who reportedly fired stop-bullets at their cars. When they got out of their cars, the policemen allegedly attacked them. Afterwards they were taken to Mount *Vitosha* just outside Sofia, where the ill-treatment continued. Eye-witnesses state that the police beat them with batons and nunchakus (weapons used in martial arts). One of the victims was still in hospital two weeks later with a “bruised lung” and a broken arm. Finally they were taken to police headquarters and after half an hour released and transported to the Military Hospital.

Amnesty International is concerned that incidents like these are not investigated properly and impartially by the Bulgarian prosecuting authorities. This concern is reflected in the fact that, in cases brought to Amnesty International’s attention, no police officer serving in the special forces has ever been charged with “causing bodily injury while carrying out his duty” (Article 131 par. 2 of the Bulgarian Penal Code). The organization is urging the authorities to take this problem very serious and to commit themselves to investigating incidents where law enforcement officers have used unwarranted force and ill-treated people in their custody. Amnesty International also considers it to be of the highest importance that the Bulgarian authorities devise and implement urgently effective training programs for law enforcement officers with special attention given to human rights.