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BULGARIA: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL URGES GOVERNMENT TO PROVIDE FURTHER INFORMATION ON HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

In a document published today, Amnesty International expressed concern that the information provided by the Bulgarian Ministry for Foreign Affairs in response to its June report is insufficient to assess whether official investigations into alleged human rights violations have been prompt and impartial.

In June Amnesty International published a report which described seven deaths in custody in suspicious circumstances, three incidents in which six people were shot and 17 cases of torture and ill-treatment of dozens of victims.

The response of the Bulgarian authorities contains no information on three cases of deaths in detention in suspicious circumstances. In the remaining four cases no police officer has been charged with any criminal offence. In one of these cases, in April 1995 Assen Ivanov was examined by a doctor following his arrest who did not observe any injuries. The following day he died in Sandanski hospital from "brain concussion and haemorrhage". Although the investigation by the District Investigation Office has not been completed, the Bulgarian authorities reported that there is no evidence that any police officer was responsible for the alleged ill-treatment of Assen Ivanov.

"Once again we urge the Bulgarian Government to observe its international commitments and to initiate thorough and impartial investigations into all these incidents, to make public the findings and to bring to justice those responsible for human rights violations", Amnesty International said.

The reply of the Bulgarian authorities also included information about investigations into 12 cases of ill-treatment described in Amnesty International's report. However, no information was given on three incidents involving four people and an incident involving dozens of people which occurred in Rakitovo in February 1995. Similarly, no information was given about any investigations into three incidents of police shootings in which six people were injured.

In only one of the 12 cases had the police officers allegedly responsible for ill-treatment been disciplined with a "reprobation". Investigations in four cases were closed without any information on the reasons for such a decision. In three cases no information was given about an investigation into the reported ill-treatment. In the remaining four cases an investigation has been initiated or is under consideration by the military prosecutors.

Finally, there was no information about investigations into any of the ill-treatment or shooting incidents involving officers of the Specialized Unit to Combat Terrorism, commonly known as the Red Berets. These incidents were described in June in Amnesty International's report. No information has been available on a number of similar incidents involving the Red Berets which the organization has been urging Bulgarian authorities to investigate since 1993.

For further information: *Bulgaria: Shootings, deaths in custody, torture and ill-treatment* (AI Index: EUR 15/07/96).