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Romania: Police brutality must be stopped

Reports of beatings and shootings by police demonstrate that Romania, more than ten years after the overthrow of the Ceausescu regime, has so far failed to give human rights sufficient priority in its agenda for reform, Amnesty International said today, releasing two reports.

The two reports highlight a disregard for human rights by Romanian law enforcement officials and a lack of legal and institutional reforms on the part of the authorities.

The first report, on the excessive use of firearms by law enforcement officials, details recent cases of shootings by police and calls for thorough and impartial investigations.

In May 2000 a Bucharest police officer shot a young Romani man in the head at point blank range after reportedly beating him and knocking his head against a wall. Mugurel Soare is now paralyzed. Witnesses were allegedly detained and intimidated by other police officers.

In other recent cases, police officers in Bucharest shot dead two Romani men who were fleeing the scenes of alleged minor crimes, and who were reportedly unarmed. Romanian coastguards in the Black Sea opened fire on Turkish fishing boats on two occasions in May 2000.

Amnesty International has repeatedly urged the Romanian authorities to bring the national law on police use of firearms in line with international standards. In July 1999 the UN Human Rights Committee stated that it was "disturbed at continued incidents involving the use of firearms by the police, especially in cases of petty offences committed by minors".

The second report details cases of ill-treatment by the new emergency intervention police unit in Buzau county. The commander of the Buzau unit has a reported history of aggression, which has included beating women in public. In its first three months of operation, four complaints of ill-treatment were filed against the unit.

The police unit allegedly attacked and severely beat 33-year-old businessman Silviu Rosioru in a pub on 26 January 2000 before they took him to a police station. The medical report stated that he was left with "Chest and abdominal injuries. Extensive bruising on the left thigh and buttock. Head and face injuries. Contusions on both hands."

Amnesty International is concerned about the standards applied by the Romanian authorities in recruiting and training new emergency intervention police units, which were established throughout Romania at county level in Autumn 1999.

The organization calls on the authorities to respect their obligations to international treaties and ensure that people are not subjected to police ill-treatment. Where necessary, the authorities should undertake focused and sustained measures of institutional reform in police units.

"A police force should respect and protect human rights -- not violate them. If the government is to take its reform agenda seriously, it should hold police officers who commit violations to account," Amnesty International said.

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For more information or copies of the two reports, *Romania: Excessive use of firearms by law enforcement officials, and the need for legal reform* and *Romania: alleged ill-treatment by emergency intervention police unit in Buzau county, Concerns and Recommendations*, please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566
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