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Amnesty International Report 2010 - Albania

REPUBLIC OF ALBANIA

Head of state: Bamir Topi
Head of government: Sali Berisha
Death penalty: abolitionist for all crimes
Population: 3.2 million
Life expectancy: 76.5 years
Under-5 mortality (m/f): 18/17 per 1,000
Adult literacy: 99 per cent

Women increasingly reported domestic violence and sought legal protection, although many later withdrew complaints. There were arrests and convictions for the trafficking of women for forced prostitution. Some detainees in police stations and prisons alleged torture or other ill-treatment. Detention conditions in police stations and many prisons were often very poor, despite some improvements in the treatment of prisoners. Adult orphans were denied their legal right to adequate housing.

Background

In April Albania became a member of NATO and applied for membership of the EU. In November the European Council agreed that Albania should be considered for EU candidate status. National elections were narrowly won in June by the governing Democratic Party and its allies. The main opposition party, the Socialist Party, boycotted parliament in protest against voting irregularities. Unemployment, particularly among young people, was high. Corruption in the judiciary and government remained a serious problem.

Violence against women and children

Women, particularly in urban centres, increasingly reported domestic violence. Nonetheless, many incidents went unreported and women frequently withdrew complaints under family pressure and for lack of economic independence. According to official figures, in the first nine months of the year, 990 occurrences of domestic

violence, mostly against women, were reported. Courts dealt with 640 petitions from victims for protection orders. Domestic violence was not a specific offence in the criminal code, and was generally only prosecuted when it resulted in death, severe injury or was accompanied by threats to life.

- In October Lirie Neziri and her four children sought refuge from her repeatedly violent husband at a hospital in Pukë, where they spent a week sleeping on the floor. Following media coverage, police arrested her husband, and she and the children were given temporary shelter at a social centre in Shkoder.

Trafficking in human beings

According to the US State Department Trafficking in Persons Report 2009, issued in June, Albania remained a source country for men, women and children trafficked for the purposes of sexual exploitation and forced labour, including forced begging. The report stated that the government "does not fully comply with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking; however, it is making significant efforts to do so." Prosecutions remained scarce because victims feared reprisals by their traffickers, or were pressured by their families to withdraw complaints. During 2009 the Serious Crimes Court convicted five people of trafficking women for prostitution and four of trafficking children.

- Agron Alijaj was arrested in Fier in January. In 2008 he had allegedly seduced a 14-year-old girl and taken her to Kosovo, where he forced her to work as a prostitute.
- In January Astrit Pata and his son Nelgert were fined and sentenced to 15 and 16 years' imprisonment respectively for trafficking two women and forcing them to work as prostitutes.

Enforced disappearances

- The trial of former officers of the National Intelligence Service, Ilir Kumbaro, Arben Sefgjini and Avni Koldashi, which began in 2008, continued. They were charged with the abduction and "torture with serious consequences" of three men in 1995. Proceedings against a fourth defendant were separated because of his ill-health. The fate of one of the victims, Remzi Hoxha, an ethnic Albanian from Macedonia, remained unknown. Despite the serious charges against him, Arben Sefgjini was in May appointed head of the newly established Probation Service within the Ministry of Justice. Ilir Kumbaro was tried in his absence. He had been arrested in 2008 while living in the UK under a false name; in December he was released after his appeal against extradition to Albania was upheld in a UK court, on the grounds that his arrest warrant was no longer valid.

Torture and other ill-treatment

Police and prison guards allegedly tortured or otherwise ill-treated detainees. In January the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture's report on its visit to Albania in June 2008 stated that "ill-treatment by the police ... often appears to be related to an overemphasis on confessions during criminal investigations". The Committee had received allegations of serious ill-treatment in police stations in Korça, Pogradec and Elbasan, and at Korça remand centre. The authorities subsequently said that disciplinary measures had been taken against several officials at Korça remand centre.

- In April Edison Lleshi, aged 15, threw himself out of a window of the police station in Peshkopi, breaking a leg and sustaining other injuries. The Ombudsperson concluded that he did this after being beaten and threatened by police officers who had questioned him about a theft. Disciplinary measures were taken against seven police officers, and a criminal investigation was started against one of them.

Detention conditions

A new prison was opened in Durrës and a reformatory for juvenile offenders in Kavajë. Classes were started in several prisons for inmates who were illiterate or had not completed compulsory education. Following the establishment of a Probation Service in April, a number of prisoners were released on probation, which helped to reduce overcrowding.

Conditions in many prisons and remand centres remained harsh owing to old, poorly maintained and insanitary buildings. The National Mechanism for the Prevention of Torture, under the Ombudsperson, inspected 12 prisons and some 30 police stations. It concluded that conditions in many were below national and international human rights standards for the detention of prisoners, despite an EC-funded programme for penitentiary reform. Medical facilities were often inadequate, and there was little specialist treatment available for prisoners with mental illnesses. In almost all cases, the Ombudsperson called for major reconstruction or repairs to detention areas at police stations. He also criticized the frequent lack of separate areas for women and minors in police stations. Minors were sometimes held with adults, and women in the offices of the judicial police or in corridors.

- In February the Ombudsperson concluded that the physical conditions at Burrel prison were irredeemably bad, and recommended its closure.
- In May Prison 302 and the women's remand section of Tirana Prison 313 were found to be infested with vermin.

Right to adequate housing

Under Albanian law, registered orphans up to the age of 30 are among the vulnerable groups to be prioritized when social housing is allocated. However, the law was not implemented. Over 200 adults who were orphaned as children, including those who completed their secondary education in June, continued to share rooms in often dilapidated and insanitary sections of school dormitories. Very few earned enough to rent private accommodation. In the face of a huge demand for social housing, such programmes were limited, and the income criteria for eligibility were set too high for this group. In November President Topi called for a review of legislation to provide better care for orphans under 18 years and to secure them housing and employment as adults. However, by the end of the year their situation had not improved.

Amnesty International visit/report

- Amnesty International delegates visited Albania in June.
- Albania: Promises to orphans should be a serious commitment (EUR 11/002/2009)

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