

NEWSLETTER



ALBANIAN HELSINKI COMMITTEE

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Monthly Newsletter

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1. MONITORING ACTIVITIES OF THE AHC

1.1 Monitoring of respect for citizens' rights in the judicial system

AHC correspondents conducted observations at the courts of the districts they work in during the period April-May, in order to take a close look at the respect of citizens' rights in the Albanian judicial system.

The functioning of the courts, the respect for the principle of the publicization of judicial processes, solemnness during court proceedings, respect for procedural and administrative rules, respect for the schedules of judicial processes, delays in judgments, etc., were some of the issues looked at. The target of monitoring was also the access of the public and reporters to the courts, reception of citizens, the functioning of court administration, etc.

The conclusions drawn from the monitoring and AHC recommendations to improve the existing situation have been summarized in a special report that you may find in our website in Albanian and English.¹

1.2 Monitoring and verification mission in the prison of Rrogozhina

Based on the letters and telephone calls received by the AHC from convicts serving their sentences in the prison of Rrogozhina, on **19 May 2004**, the AHC undertook a monitoring mission in these facilities with the purpose of verifying and clarifying the statements. The AHC addressed the competent bodies with regard to cases of violations observed.

1.3 Monitoring mission in the Kapshtica border crossing point

In the framework of collaboration with the Helsinki Monitor group and the Norwegian Helsinki Committee, based on letters and concerns by Albanian emigrants, the AHC undertook a monitoring mission at the border-crossing checkpoint of Kapshtica, which is located on the border between Albania and Greece.

The goal of the mission was to monitor the respect for the rights of Albanian emigrants by Albanian police and the verification of cases of the violation of the rights of Albanian emigrants by Greek border police.

Relying on surveys conducted with Albanian emigrants, the AHC is carrying out the relevant verifications.

These activities took place in the framework of the AHC project "Monitoring the respect for the rights of emigrants", financially supported by the Norwegian Helsinki Committee, which began in January 2004.

1.4 Missions in support of local AHC correspondents

With the purpose of building the capacities of AHC correspondents in the districts as well as their capacities in observing respect for human rights, in order to boost the functioning of its correspondents' network, the AHC continued its initiative undertaken months ago by carrying out a supportive mission in Korça.

In the course of this mission, AHC representatives held meetings with representatives of the local government bodies, police, the court and prosecutor's office as well as other bodies of a local level.²

¹ These observations were made in the framework of the project "The network of correspondents in 7 districts of Albania", funded by SOROS.

2 AWARENESS AND EDUCATION ACTIVITIES

2.1 Programs on local television stations

Aiming at informing the public of the local level better, AHC representatives organized a program on the local television station of Korça. By way of this program, the public learned a lot about the status and functioning of the local police station and the court in the District of Korça as well as about the respect of human rights by these institutions. Part of this program was also gaining better knowledge about the AHC, its mission and role in the protection of and respect for the rights of citizens.

2.2 Educating the public through books

On *May 5, 2004*, the Albanian Helsinki Committee participated in the book fair organized by the Council of Europe on the occasion of the 55th year of its foundation. The AHC presented and disseminated about 27 titles of its own publications in the field of human rights. These publications were offered to the broad public, including representatives from the civil society, representatives of diplomatic missions, students, high school students as well as different citizens who were interested in these publications.

In the past too, the AHC has collaborated with local and foreign human rights organizations in similar events, valuing them as bridges of communication with and information and sensitization of the public.

3. REPORTS ON RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Based on the monitoring missions carried out in the police stations of the districts where its network of correspondents is active, the AHC prepared and published a report that presents the conclusions emerging from the monitoring missions as well as the relevant recommendations for improving the respect for the human rights of citizens by public order organs, the administration of police stations and detention centers.³

4. AWARENESS AND EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES TOWARD THE RESPECT OF MINORITY RIGHTS

For the purpose of informing and sensitizing citizens on minority rights and denouncing their violation, the AHC, in collaboration with the Open Society Foundation for Albania (SOROS) published the leaflet “Know and protect our rights”. The leaflet features in a summarized way and in simple language, some of the fundamental rights and freedoms of national minorities as well as the legal obligations of the Albanian state toward them. The AHC also calls upon the minority populations to file denunciations with the AHC on cases of the violations of these rights and cases of discrimination by the public administration. This publication was prepared in the framework of the project “The role of the civil society in protecting and sensitizing the public about the rights of national minorities”. The project is implemented by the AHC in collaboration with the Open Civil Society Foundation, Tirana.

5. ROUND TABLES AND CONFERENCES

² These observations were made in the framework of the project “The network of correspondents in 7 districts of Albania”, funded by SOROS.

³ You may find this report in English and Albanian on our internet page www.ahc.org.al

One of the forms in which the AHC carries out its activities with regard to improving the practice of law enforcement and the respect for citizens' rights is that of meetings and round tables of experts on certain topics.

5.1 Round table on “Free legal counsel and the assigned one. What can we improve?”

Stemming from the concerns raised in the letters and complaints of citizens with regard to law services, the AHC conducted a research study on the legislation on and the practice of the enforcement of the law on lawyer services in general, and of free legal counsel in particular. The conclusions of the study and the survey that was done were discussed in a round table discussion on: “Free legal counsel and the assigned one. What can we improve?”, organized on 27 May 2004 at the Sheraton Hotel.

The study and the observation of the practice of respect for the rights of individuals benefiting free legal counsel dhe the assigned one, identified numerous problems, which lead to violations of human rights.

Of interest to the participants were the opinions of arrested and convicted individuals who had been interviewed, the views of prosecutors, judges and lawyers as well as the recommendations of the AHC for the improvement of free legal counsel and the assigned one.⁴

Participating in this round table discussion were senior representatives of the Ministry of Justice, of the Courts of different instances in Tirana, of the directing board of the National Chamber of Lawyers in Tirana, the Prosecutor's Office, the police, the People's Advocate, lawyers, local and foreign civil society representatives as well as known experts of the field.

6. PUBLIC REACTIONS OF THE AHC TO THE VIOLATIONS OF HUMAN RIGHTS

The AHC has reacted publicly to the most flagrant violati~~on~~s of human rights, aside from the letters and recommendations addressed to state authorities. During May 2004, the AHC issued three public statements with regard to hate speech by members of parliament and politicians, the electoral process and the quick steps to be undertaken in this direction as well as with regard to the use of violence in the detention rooms in Laç. In a chronological order, following are the statements of the AHC during May 2004.

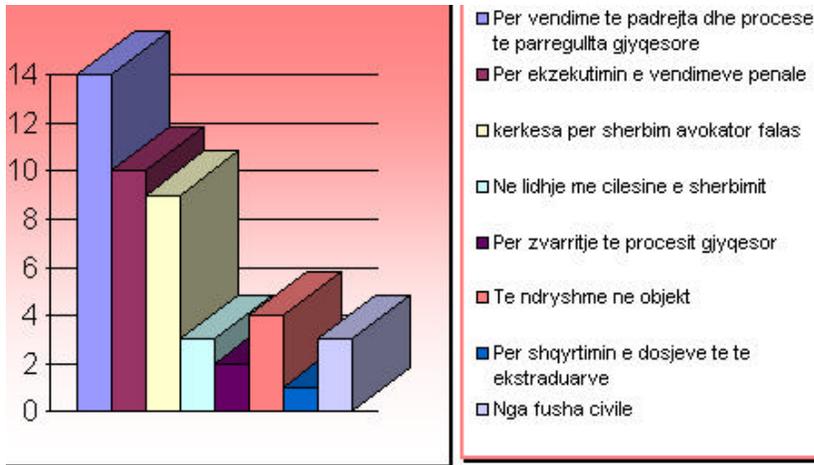
7. CITIZENS ADDRESS THE AHC

During May 2004, the Albanian Helsinki Committee received **37 letters and complaints**, mainly by convicted individuals who are serving their sentences in Albanian prisons. The majority of complaints target the violations of human rights during the judicial process, the obtainment of the right to defense, also due to the notification that the AHC sent to all prisons in the framework of the research study undertaken on this service. There were numerous complaints on irregular judicial processes and unjust decisions. Following is a graphical representation of complaints handled by the AHC.

8. AHC AND THE MEDIA

All activities of the AHC carried out during May 2004 were covered in the print and broadcast media. AHC statements were carried in the print and broadcast media monitored by the AHC.

⁴ The study on the legislation as well as the report emerging from the survey, together with the respective recommendations, are to be published soon in a special publication.



During this period, several interviews were conducted with senior members of the AHC on a variety of topics. Furthermore, the conferences and round tables organized by the AHC found complete coverage in the majority of the broadcast and print media outlets.

9. AHC AND COLLABORATION WITH LOCAL AND FOREIGN ORGANIZATIONS

During May as well, the AHC collaborated with human rights organizations, local and foreign, such as the Helsinki Federation, other Helsinki Committees, Amnesty International, etc.

In close collaboration with Amnesty International, the AHC follows closely cases of human rights violations, particularly cases of maltreatment of detained and arrested persons by police forces, as well as cases of violence at the border by foreign border forces. Based on verifications carried out, the AHC has reacted publicly and has addressed the relevant authorities.

The same purpose was served by the meetings of AHC representatives with Ms. Melanie Anderson and Jan Jansen, representatives of Amnesty International. The meetings were held on **31 May 2004**, in the AHC facilities.

During the meetings, the representatives of Amnesty International and of the AHC discussed concrete cases of maltreatment of citizens by police during detention or arrest as well as cases of maltreatment of Albanian citizens by Greek police.

Greater future collaboration between the two organizations was ensured at the end of the meeting.

10. PARTICIPATION OF AHC IN VARIOUS ACTIVITIES

During this period, AHC representatives and members of its staff participated in a variety of activities organized by local and foreign institutions as well as local and foreign organizations active in Albania.

Anex – AHC STATEMENTS

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