



GREECE

ALLEGED ABUSES IN THE POLICING OF DEMONSTRATIONS

**AMNESTY
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Amnesty International Publications

First published in 2009 by
Amnesty International Publications
International Secretariat
Peter Benenson House
1 Easton Street
London WC1X 0DW
United Kingdom
www.amnesty.org

© Amnesty International Publications 2009

Index: EUR 25/001/2009
Original language: English
Printed by Amnesty International,
International Secretariat, United Kingdom

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Cover photo: Greek riot police threatening the use of firearms against demonstrators. Athens, Greece, 7 December 2008.

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GREECE: ALLEGED ABUSES BY POLICE IN THE CONTEXT OF POLICING DEMONSTRATIONS

Amnesty International has longstanding and continuing concerns regarding the failure of the authorities in Greece to ensure that the police respect and protect human rights. Allegations of human rights violations committed by the police continue to be made, in the context of both policing demonstrations and during arrest and detention. Such violations include excessive use of force during demonstrations; arbitrary detention; torture or other ill-treatment; and denial of prompt access to legal assistance. These patterns of abuse by the police have been documented by Amnesty International over many years¹. Despite calls by the organization and by international bodies to the authorities to take decisive action to address these patterns, many of Amnesty International's concerns have been exemplified in the case of the fatal police shooting in Athens of Alexandros-Andreas (Alexis) Gregoropoulos on 6 December 2008, and in the conduct of officers – including the use of force – while policing the subsequent demonstrations, many of which erupted into riots in the aftermath of the shooting.²

This report highlights such concerns, as well as those relating to the treatment in custody of both peaceful demonstrators and those uninvolved in demonstrations after 6 December.³ The organization considers that these recent incidents could serve as a timely catalyst for the government to launch a wide-ranging commission of inquiry. Such a commission would investigate not only these incidents but also systemic issues, including training of police on the use of force and firearms, and the implementation of other safeguards against torture and ill-treatment, including access to lawyers and families for those detained or arrested.

This report concludes with a set of recommendations to the Greek authorities which, if implemented, would constitute major steps forward in ensuring that the country lives up to its obligations to respect and protect human rights in law enforcement. These obligations are set out in a range of international instruments, including the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (ECHR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).

THE SHOOTING OF ALEXIS GREGOROPOULOS

Over recent months Amnesty International has been following the investigations into the fatal shooting of 15-year-old Alexis Gregoropoulos on the evening of 6 December 2008 in the area of Exarchia in Athens. It has been widely reported that he was killed by a bullet through the heart fired by a police officer serving as a special guard.⁴

Accounts of events leading up to the killing have varied. According to the statement of special guard Epaminondas Korkoneas, the officer who fired the shot that killed Alexis Gregoropoulos, he and his colleague Vassilios Saraliotis saw a group of about 30 people at a distance of 10-15 metres moving threateningly towards them.⁵ Unable to stop the group's course, and being in fear of their lives, the two special guards, according to the statement, turned around and moved away. "At the same time," the statement continues, "and so as to ensure our escape, being in a state of shock and in fear, after the crowd did not halt their advance, despite the throwing of a flash grenade by my colleague, I took my police handgun out of its case and, guided by an instinct of preservation, fired two warning shots into the air, maybe a third as well, which I had not realized [doing], but was reminded of it by my co-accused." Regarding the death of Alexis Gregoropoulos, Epaminondas Korkoneas stated that "the only certain and indubitable version [explanation] regarding his fatal wounding is that one of the warning shots fired into the air ricocheted."

According to bystanders, two police officers in a vehicle drove up near Alexis Gregoropoulos and his group of friends at around 9pm and verbally abused them. As the officers left, someone in the group threw a bottle. The police officers parked their vehicle and returned to the scene on foot, engaging in further confrontation with the youths. During this exchange, an officer fired three shots, one of which killed Alexis Gregoropoulos.

Within days both special guards had been suspended. Epaminondas Korkoneas has been charged with unlawful use of firearms and manslaughter with intent. Vassilios Saraliotis has been charged with complicity. Both were subsequently detained.

The police ballistics report dated 18 December 2008 was not made public officially, but has been leaked and is available through an internet blog. According to this source, the report concluded that the deformation of the bullet that killed Alexis Gregoropoulos "completely conforms to the side of the bullet having impacted with a hard inflexible surface, and following this, the bullet having ricocheted (changed course), from the surface in question." Amnesty International has also recently learned that on-site tests by the police, in the presence of experts appointed by the accused and the victim's family on 21 December, have concluded that the supposed impact occurred close to the ground but at a distance of several metres from the point where the special guard who fired the shot stood. These findings indicate that the special guard may have aimed his gun towards the ground where the group of youths was standing, and also supports eyewitness accounts by bystanders that an officer pointed his gun forward, toward the group of youths where Alexis Gregoropoulos was standing, and not in the air as Epaminondas Korkoneas has stated.

The two special guards petitioned for release from custody, but this was turned down by the Athens Misdemeanours Council in February 2009. In its decision, the Athens Misdemeanours Council also reported that the two special guards disobeyed instructions to leave the scene after their initial confrontation with the youths.

Amnesty International is concerned that, should the account of events leading to the death of Alexis Gregoropoulos as described above by bystanders prove correct, the use of lethal force by the special guard would be disproportionate and therefore unlawful under international human rights standards.

The UN Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials states that “Law enforcement officials may use force only when strictly necessary and to the extent required for the performance of their duty” (Article 3) and that “The use of firearms is considered an extreme measure. Every effort should be made to exclude the use of firearms, especially against children. In general, firearms should not be used except when a suspected offender offers armed resistance or otherwise jeopardizes the lives of others and less extreme measures are not sufficient to restrain or apprehend the suspected offender” (commentary on Article 3(c)). According to the Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials, “Law enforcement officials shall not use firearms against persons except in self-defence or defence of others against the imminent threat of death or serious injury, to prevent the perpetration of a particularly serious crime involving grave threat to life, to arrest a person presenting such a danger and resisting their authority, or to prevent his or her escape, and only when less extreme means are insufficient to achieve these objectives. In any event, intentional lethal use of firearms may only be made when strictly unavoidable in order to protect life” (Principle 9).

It has also been reported that a toxicology examination was performed on Alexis Gregoropoulos’ body, and Amnesty International has sought information from the Greek authorities as to whether the two police officers also underwent such an examination.

THE POLICING OF DEMONSTRATIONS AND RIOTS AFTER 6 DECEMBER – ILL-TREATMENT, ARBITRARY ARRESTS AND DENIAL OF PROMPT LEGAL ASSISTANCE

Amnesty International notes that the Greek authorities have both a responsibility and an obligation under international law to ensure the safety and security of people and property, and acknowledges the difficulties faced by law enforcement officials while policing violent demonstrations. On 4 January 2009, for example, a 21-year-old police officer named Diamantis Mantzounis, who served in the riot police, was shot and seriously injured while he was on patrol that evening with a special guard in the Exarchia area of Athens. An armed group calling itself Revolutionary Struggle claimed responsibility. However, the Greek authorities also have a clear duty to ensure that the policing of demonstrations is carried out in a manner that complies with international standards, including those on the use of force.

Under the UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials, Principle 13 states that law enforcement officials should avoid the use of force to disperse unlawful but non-violent assemblies or “where that is not practicable, shall restrict such force to the minimum extent necessary”. Principle 14 states: “in the dispersal of violent assemblies, law enforcement officials may use firearms only when less dangerous means are not practicable and only to the minimum extent necessary” (Principle 14). The same principle states that “law enforcement officials shall not use firearms in such cases, except under the conditions stipulated in Principle 9 [i.e. to protect life or to prevent the perpetration of a particularly serious crime involving grave threat to life].”

With respect to the use of firearms, Amnesty International has received information about a number of cases in which riot police present at demonstrations in December, including on the day of the funeral of Alexis Gregoropoulos, fired shots into the air. These incidents are being investigated by the police. Amnesty International has requested information from the authorities on the total number of such incidents being investigated and the context in which they took place.

Amnesty International is concerned about mounting allegations of police excessive use of force against, and ill-treatment of, peaceful demonstrators, attested to by images that have appeared in the international and national media. International human rights law, including provisions in the ICCPR and the ECHR, as well as the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, prohibits torture or other ill-treatment and requires states to ensure that allegations of such treatment are investigated effectively and independently.

Among those who reported being ill-treated were two members of Amnesty International, who described how they were peacefully demonstrating on the afternoon of 7 December in Alexandras Avenue in Athens, when at least two officers beat them with truncheons as a riot police unit of around 20-25 officers confronted the crowd. There are also a number of media reports in which demonstrators allege that officers from riot police units engaged in verbal exchanges with them on different occasions, threatening the demonstrators' physical integrity, including through reference to the death of Alexis Gregoropoulos (one such incident was reported on the AI-Tsadiri News television show on 16 December 2008).

Amnesty International has also received reports from Athens and other parts of Greece about arbitrary arrests, ill-treatment and the denial of prompt access to legal assistance. The organization has raised four cases with the authorities, in which police officers, tasked with policing demonstrations in central Athens on 15 and 18 December 2008, were alleged to have subjected individuals, including demonstrators, to such violations of their rights.

Under international human rights law, every person arrested or detained has the right to be promptly informed of the charges against them (Articles 9(2) and 14(3)(a) of the ICCPR; Articles 5(2) and 6(3)(a) of the ECHR).⁶ Moreover, international standards state that every person arrested or detained has the right to assistance of legal counsel (Principle 1 of the Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers). Furthermore, ensuring that a detained person has access to counsel is an important safeguard for the protection of rights, and in view of this, the UN Human Rights Committee has stressed that "all persons arrested must have immediate access to counsel". Principle 7 of the Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers states that access to a lawyer must be granted promptly.⁷

In one case, a 26-year-old student reported being subjected to ill-treatment and verbal abuse by riot police officers on 15 December. She said that she was stopped by police while walking with her mother near the General Police Directorate of Attica (GADA) in Athens, near an area where a demonstration, in which she said she had not participated, had taken place earlier. She said that she was ill-treated on arrest, and verbally abused with sexual remarks both during her arrest as well as the three and a half hours she spent in detention in the GADA. During her detention, she was not allowed to have contact with her mother who was waiting outside, nor was she allowed to contact a lawyer. She also reported being held with a 17-year-old detainee in the station lobby, where two police officers were also present. According to her, the teenager was visibly distressed by having been allegedly ill-treated, and a woman who entered the room later and identified herself as the teenager's lawyer told her of the teenager's allegation that police officers planted evidence by placing rocks inside his pockets during his transportation to the GADA.

The student reported that throughout her arrest and detention, she repeatedly asked police

officers about the reasons for her arrest and for the names of the arresting officers but received no reply. She also reported that she repeatedly asked to see her mother, who was outside the station, but was refused. In addition, when the teenager's lawyer approached the student, the police officers present reportedly tried to prevent the lawyer from speaking to the student on the grounds that she already had a lawyer, although they knew this was not the case. The lawyer was only allowed to speak to her after the lawyer stated that the student's mother had appointed her as counsel for her daughter.

In another case, on 17 December 23-year-old Giorgos Gregoriades was arrested while walking in central Athens with two friends long after the end of a demonstration in the area. Giorgos Gregoriades' lawyer reported to Amnesty International that as four to five riot police units confronted the dispersing crowd, some of whom had thrown stones, officers pounced on her client and began to beat, kick, and punch him. As a result, Giorgos Gregoriades sustained multiple injuries to his face. Giorgos Gregoriades was taken to the police station half an hour after his arrest, where he was charged with various offences, including possession and manufacture of explosives and arson. His lawyer alleged that all the charges faced by her client were manufactured and that her client had in fact not taken part in the demonstration. Giorgos Gregoriades was allowed medical treatment three hours after he was allegedly beaten and was initially not allowed to contact his family or a lawyer. His lawyer, who was appointed by his family, was initially denied access to her client at the GADA, and was told that Giorgos Gregoriades had already contacted his lawyer.

Amnesty International has also received reports that on 9 January 2009, following the end of a demonstration in Athens, demonstrators began to disperse peacefully. Some headed towards Asklipiou Street. At that point, riot police blocked the entrance to the street using police vans, trapping a number of people inside an alcove in front of a building at 14 Asklipiou Street. It was reported that police began to indiscriminately beat the people they had herded there. As a result, at least two people received head wounds and the owner of a kiosk in the building had his arm broken. According to reports received by Amnesty International from witnesses at the scene, the injured were left on the street without medical assistance. Lawyers and journalists arrived at the scene shortly afterward and were initially refused access to the street. In their attempt to approach the victims they were also allegedly beaten. Lawyers who had offices inside the building were blockaded, along with other residents, and some were reportedly subject to cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment when they came out to the entrance of the building to speak to police demanding to know whether they were being detained and on what grounds. According to footage made available on the internet, covering some 10 minutes of the incident, the police refused to answer questions by the people trapped inside as to whether they were being arrested or not, and what the reasons for this action were. This information was also denied to lawyers, who presented police officers with their lawyers' identity cards. In the same footage, police officers are seen stopping an elderly woman who attempted to leave the building and dragging her along the pavement.

Amnesty International understands that at the end of this incident, at least 17 individuals were arrested (with other sources quoting a figure of 22 or more), including a large number of lawyers, and that the detainees were released after three and a half hours without charge. According to a complaint lodged by the Legal Aid Group and made public on 11 January, many lawyers present at the scene were subjected to ill-treatment or degrading treatment by

the police. Lawyers present at the scene reported to Amnesty International being dragged along the pavement and street by police officers and being thrown into the police van that took them to the GADA. The organization has also received reports that the police ill-treated their colleagues who waited for them outside the GADA building and protested at the arrests. Amnesty International has been informed that complaints have also been filed regarding this incident and that the judicial investigation is currently in its preliminary stage.

According to one unofficial report, 284 arrests of both Greek citizens and foreign nationals were carried out in 16 different towns throughout Greece between 6 December 2008 and 14 January 2009, and in 67 cases individuals were detained pending trial. Some of those arrested were under 18. Trial dates have been set for March, June and October 2009.

ARREST, DETENTION, AND DEPORTATION OF MIGRANTS IN THE CONTEXT OF RIOT POLICING

According to information provided to Amnesty International by the Ministry of the Interior and Public Order on 27 January 2009, 130 foreign nationals were arrested between 6 and 17 December 2008 throughout Greece in the context of the disturbances and at least some of them were expelled from the country under administrative expulsion orders. Amnesty International is concerned that some of those expelled may have been asylum-seekers, and that some people may have been forcibly returned to places where they were at risk of torture or other ill-treatment, in violation of the principle of *non-refoulement*.

Article 32 of the UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees stipulates that “the Contracting States shall not expel a refugee lawfully in their territory save on grounds of national security or public order” and that “the expulsion of such a refugee shall be only in pursuance of a decision reached in accordance with due process of law. Except where compelling reasons of national security otherwise require, the refugee shall be allowed to submit evidence to clear himself, and to appeal to and be represented for the purpose before competent authority or a person or persons specially designated by the competent authority”. In addition, the article stipulates that “The Contracting States shall allow such a refugee a reasonable period within which to seek legal admission into another country...” Article 33 of the same Convention prohibits the expulsion or return of a refugee to a place where his life or freedom would be threatened. Article 3 of the Convention against Torture also stipulates that “no State Party shall expel, return (‘refouler’) or extradite a person to another State where there are substantial grounds for believing that he would be in danger of being subjected to torture.” In a landmark ruling in February 2009 in the case of *A and Others v UK*, the European Court of Human Rights re-affirmed the absolute prohibition of torture and other inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. The ruling forbids states from sending anyone – including those suspected of terrorism and/or those who are alleged to pose a risk to national security – to countries where there is reason to believe they would face such violations.

Should the total number of arrests given above be correct, Amnesty International is additionally concerned that foreign nationals constituted a large proportion of those arrested during the demonstrations and riots, which appears to be disproportionate to the general composition of the demonstrating and rioting crowds, and which may be the result of discriminatory practices.

ARRESTS OF CHILDREN

Amnesty International has received information about alleged violations of the rights of individuals, including children, arrested and detained in the town of Larisa on 8 December 2008. It was reported that some children were ill-treated, that the specific rights of children were not respected, that individuals were denied prompt legal assistance, and that allegedly arbitrary charges were brought against them. In total, 25 people were arrested in Larisa during the policing of demonstrations which had turned violent, and rioters destroyed bank buildings. Twenty-one of those arrested have been charged under legislation relating to organized crime. Of these, 17 are children aged between 15 and 17, and four are adults. The children were reportedly detained overnight at the local police station, while the four adults were, at the time of writing (March 2009), still in detention awaiting trial. All of those arrested were also reportedly denied prompt legal assistance while in detention.

Amnesty International is particularly concerned about reported violations of the rights of the 17 children arrested. Lawyers for the children reported to the organization that during their overnight detention, the children were not allowed to contact their families or their lawyers. In addition, police authorities refused to provide information in answer to repeated requests from the detainee's parents about whether their children were indeed arrested or in which police station they were being held. The reports also claimed that during their detention the children were held together with adults. The organization has also learned that several of those arrested alleged that they were beaten by police officers during their arrest but were unwilling to report it.

According to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, "no child shall be deprived of his or her liberty unlawfully or arbitrarily. The arrest, detention or imprisonment of a child shall be in conformity with the law and shall be used only as a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate period of time" (Article 37(b)). Additionally, "every child deprived of liberty shall be treated with humanity and respect for the inherent dignity of the human person, and in a manner which takes into account the needs of persons of his or her age. In particular, every child deprived of liberty shall be separated from adults unless it is considered in the child's best interest not to do so and shall have the right to maintain contact with his or her family through correspondence and visits, save in exceptional circumstances" (Article 37(c)). Furthermore, Article 40 of the Convention specifies that "every child alleged as or accused of having infringed the penal law has at least the following guarantees", which include "to be informed promptly and directly of the charges against him or her, and, if appropriate, through his or her parents or legal guardians, and to have legal or other appropriate assistance in the preparation and presentation of his or her defence." This is complemented by Article 37(d), which states that "every child deprived of his or her liberty shall have the right to prompt access to legal and other appropriate assistance as well as the right to challenge the legality of the deprivation of his or her liberty before a court or other competent, independent and impartial authority, and to a prompt decision on any such action."

Amongst other charges, all of those charged under legislation relating to organized crime face charges of forming a criminal organization and are accused of holding sticks which bore marks of having been used to destroy property. The arrests were made at different locations and at different times during the night. A lawyer representing two of the accused reported that one of his clients, who is under 18, was arrested 30 minutes after the end of the riots and while he was on his way home, while the other, also under 18, had been arrested four hours earlier in a different location. The lawyer also reported that the charge sheet outlining

the specifics of the arrest was identical for each detainee, with only the name, time and place of arrest being changed for each of those charged. The verbatim listing of the alleged crime was that all were accused of holding sticks bearing marks of having been used to destroy property. Amnesty International understands that no evidence has been submitted to indicate that those charged under this legislation had previous links.

Amnesty International is concerned that given the absence of similar charges being applied to demonstrators elsewhere, who have been charged with various offences including theft, destruction of property, contravention of the law on weapons, disturbing the peace, and illegal migration (in the case of some migrants), the application of this particular piece of legislation may have been arbitrary. According to the ICCPR, “all persons are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to the equal protection of the law” (Article 26). In light of this application of the Greek law, the organization is additionally concerned about the broad scope of Law 2928/2001 “for the modification of provisions of the Penal Code and Code of Penal Procedure and for the protection of citizens from punishable acts of criminal organizations”,⁸ under which individuals who are members of a group of three persons or more can be punished with imprisonment of up to 10 years for a series of offences ranging from forgery to arson, causing an explosion, poisoning sources or foodstuffs, compromising the security of railways, ships and aircraft, manslaughter with intent, causing grievous bodily harm, abduction, rape, child molestation, robbery, smuggling of people, usury, and cyber-crime (article 1). More specifically, the organization is concerned that the law punishes the “construction, supply, or possession of weapons, explosives and chemical or biological substances, or substances that release harmful radiation” (article 1) but fails to specify the types of “weapons” referred to.

The organization is concerned that should the allegations outlined above be substantiated, such treatment would constitute violations of international human rights treaties to which Greece is a party, such as the ICCPR, the Convention against Torture, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the ECHR.

CONCLUSION

The organization regrets to note that the killing of Alexis Gregoropoulos and the alleged violations of human rights in the context of policing the demonstrations are the culmination of a pattern of serious human rights violations by law enforcement officials, which includes excessive use of force, torture and other ill-treatment, and misuse of firearms. As a result of its research into human rights violations by law enforcement officials over the last decade, Amnesty International has been calling on the authorities to investigate independently and effectively all such alleged violations. Amnesty International regrets that this and other recommendations appear not to have been implemented. On the contrary, more than six years after the publication of a 2002 joint Amnesty International-International Helsinki Federation report on impunity and the misuse of firearms by law enforcement officials, there is an apparent rise in allegations of torture or other ill-treatment by police officers. Furthermore, since the publication of that report, the European Court of Human Rights has found Greece in violation of Articles 2 (right to life) and 3 (prohibition of torture or inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment) of the ECHR on several occasions.

The concerns highlighted in this report focus on human rights violations reported within the context of the policing of demonstrations in December 2008 and January 2009. However,

the organization believes that a thorough review of patterns of abuse with a view to ensuring effective accountability for the excessive use of force and other violations by law enforcement officials would facilitate better protection of human rights. The widely publicized images of protestors embattled with police officers have reinforced the view in recent months that law enforcement officials may often exceed their powers. The allegations of violations referred to in this report regrettably provide instances where this may have been the case. In this context, the organization believes that a strong message must be sent that no one can be above the law - especially those charged with enforcing it.

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL'S RECOMMENDATIONS

Amnesty International believes that the authorities' response to the killing of Alexis Gregoropoulos and the protests which erupted in the aftermath of his death should not end with the ongoing police and judicial investigations. These events provide the government with an opportunity to address longstanding systemic problems of policing and the failure to comply with international human rights standards. Thus Amnesty International recommends that the government set up an independent commission of inquiry, mandated to investigate the full circumstances surrounding the death of Alexis Gregoropoulos and the police response to the demonstrations and the riots that began on 6 December. The inquiry should be composed of impartial, competent and independent members authorized to obtain all information necessary to the inquiry, and its findings should be published.

Among other issues, the organization believes that the inquiry should include scrutiny of the training provided to law enforcement personnel, including special guards, whose training currently lasts four months, with a view to including more thorough training on the lawful use of force and firearms, in accordance with the UN Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials and the UN Basic Principles on Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials, as well as to provide training on respect for human rights.

Amnesty International believes that the inquiry should also investigate the treatment of children arrested and detained with a view to revising practices to ensure that they fully accord with the requirements of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Anyone suspected of acting in contravention of international law should be brought to justice and child victims of human rights violations should have access to redress and reparation.

Amnesty International urges the Greek authorities to take all necessary steps to prevent excessive use of force and other violations by the police in future protests and to investigate thoroughly, promptly, independently and impartially all allegations of such abuses.

The organization also urges the authorities to undertake a thorough investigation of the patterns of abuse which have led to a lack of public confidence in policing. The organization notes that one of the issues raised during the recent demonstrations and riots was a lack of confidence among the general populace in policing.

¹ Over the last decade, Amnesty International has publicised its concerns about such violations in a

number of documents, including a report published jointly with the International Helsinki Federation in 2002, entitled *Greece: In the Shadow of Impunity: Ill-treatment and the misuse of firearms* (Index: EUR 25/022/2002). In 2005, a report entitled *Greece: Out of the Spotlight: The rights of foreigners and minorities are still a grey area* (Index: EUR 25/022/2005) outlined a number of concerns about police treatment of migrants and other marginalized groups. Further cases have been documented in press releases over the last few years, including *Greece: Impunity for ill-treatment by police must stop now!* (AI Index: EUR 25/007/2007), and *Greece: Failing system of police accountability* (Press release issued on 9 December 2008), as well as in several instances of correspondence with the government.

² The demonstrations began a few hours after the death of Alexis Gregoropoulos was announced on the evening of 6 December 2008. They increased in intensity during that week and continued throughout December and the first half of January. On various occasions, in Athens, as well as in cities all over Greece, the demonstrations erupted into riots, during which considerable damage to property was done. The demonstrations and riots were largely depicted as a protest movement led by Greek youth who were attempting to express their frustration over a number of social and economic issues, including for example unemployment and inadequate welfare provisions. Even though high-school students were on many occasions at the forefront of the demonstrations, many of them were organized by trade unions, educationalists, and other civil society groups. Wider economic and social issues were indeed debated during this period; however, the demonstrations were largely characterized by widespread antagonism against the system of policing, including concerns over police violence and impunity.

³ Amnesty International wrote to the Minister of Interior and Public Order outlining these and other concerns on 5 March 2009.

⁴ Special guards are special recruits in the police force that have limited policing duties. Their recruitment began in 1999 and is administered by laws N2734 of 1999, N2838 of 2000 and Presidential Decree 39 of 2007. Special guards are mostly recruited from military Special Forces (which include, among others, commando units, marines, parachutists, and mine clearance units) and are graduates of Higher or Technical Educational Institutions. There are currently 2000 special guards operating throughout Greece, either as patrol units or part of larger police units. Special guards receive training that is shorter than other police recruits, reportedly of four months' duration. For more information see the website of the Association of Special Guards in the region of Attica, <http://www.sefeaa.gr/>.

⁵ Parts of the statement were published in the daily newspaper *To Vima* on 10 December 2008.

⁶ Article 9 of the ICCPR states that “no one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest or detention” and that “anyone who is arrested shall be informed, at the time of arrest, of the reasons for his arrest and shall be promptly informed of any charges against him”.

⁷ In addition, the Body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment further states that “a detained person and his counsel, if any, shall receive prompt and full communication of any order of detention, together with the reasons therefore” (Principle 11(2)). The same Body of Principles also stipulates that “any person shall, at the moment of arrest and at the commencement of detention or imprisonment, or promptly thereafter, be provided by the authority responsible for his arrest, detention or imprisonment, respectively with information on and an explanation of his rights and how to avail himself of such rights” (Principle 13).

⁸ An outline of some of the provisions of this law was provided in Greece's fifth periodic report to the UN Security Council's Counter-Terrorism Committee in 2006.



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GREECE

ALLEGED ABUSES IN THE POLICING OF DEMONSTRATIONS

A long-standing history of human rights violations committed by police in Greece has been highlighted by the fatal shooting of 15-year-old Alexandros-Andreas (Alexis) Gregoropoulos by police on 6 December 2008. The police response to the protests which erupted in the wake of the shooting has also given rise to grave concern.

Amnesty International has received numerous reports of human rights violations by the police in the context of policing the protests, including excessive use of force and firearms, torture and other ill-treatment, arbitrary detention, and denial of prompt access to legal assistance. Complaints of such violations have also been received from children. The failure of the authorities to effectively address the range of abuses over the years is reflected in a growing lack of public confidence in policing.

This report highlights Amnesty International's concerns about the shooting of Alexis Gregoropoulos and reports concerning police conduct during protests, as well as the treatment of both peaceful demonstrators and those uninvolved in demonstrations after 6 December. These incidents could serve as a timely catalyst for the government to launch a wide-ranging commission of inquiry. Such a commission should investigate not only these incidents but also systemic issues, including training of police on the use of force and firearms, and the implementation of other safeguards against torture and other ill-treatment, such as access to lawyers and families for those detained or arrested.

In this report, Amnesty International presents specific recommendations directed at ensuring that the authorities live up to their obligations to respect and protect human rights during law enforcement.

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Index: EUR 25/001/2009
March 2009

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