

Why Self-determination?

Self-determination is the right of all colonized peoples. The absence of preparation in the fields of politics, economics, society or education cannot be used as a pretext to delay independence. (UN SC Resolution 1514, 1960)

VETEVENDOSJE!
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Newsletter from the Movement for SELF-DETERMINATION!

Nr.29, 12th February, 2007

THIS WEEK:

Arben Xheladini and Mon Balaj, martyrs for freedom

**The dead, injured, beaten and arrested
Candlelit vigil
Breaking and entering our offices**

On Saturday 10th February, we confronted the real meaning of UN justice and human rights.

Arben Xheladini from Prishtina and Mon Balaj from Besianë died on Sunday 11th February. They were shot by police during our peaceful demonstration of 10th February.

We honour their memories.

They died because they dared to express their will for self-determination and their desire for freedom.

Hundreds of people attended Arben's funeral yesterday to pay their respects, and thousands went today to Mon Balaj's funeral in Besianë. Arben's father said that he hoped that his son would be the last martyr to die in this manner for Kosovo's freedom.

Glauk Konjufca was invited by Arben's family to speak. He said, 'Arben Xheladini was shot by a revolver which bore the name of the International Police and the Police Service of Kosovo. UNMIK and our institutions which control the police were the hand that triggered this revolver.'

The dead, injured, beaten and arrested

Arben Xheladini and Mon Balaj died because they were shot in the head by the police. Zenel Zeneli is struggling for his life in hospital – he has 'metal' inside his body. There are 7 still in hospital in Prishtina, 1 in intensive care in Bonsteel and 1 in intensive care in KFOR Prizren. A total of 82 people were injured. Of these, 22 were shot above the waist. 47 sustained injuries to the body, but the location is not specified. These injuries were sustained from rubber and plastic bullets, and from metal bullets covered in rubber, the latter which could injure you if simply thrown. An activist from Prizren has lost his sight in one eye.

The use of rubber and plastic bullets by the British in Northern Ireland and by Israelis in Palestine has been condemned by human rights organizations, by medical authorities, and even by the UN itself! 17 people died in Northern Ireland shot by plastic bullets since 1969. At close range, they are deadly. There was

barely 10 metres between the police and the protestors when they began firing. Standard regulations require that these bullets be fired at the legs of demonstrators. The police were intentionally shooting to injure and kill our demonstrators.

Four of our activists have been sentenced to 40 days in prison. They are Salih Zyba, Bujar Voca, Besnik Neziri and Suzana Hajrizi. Sabit Kadriu, a member of the Council for Human Rights and a witness at Milosevic's trial in the Hague, has been sentenced to 15 days.

Albin Kurti is still in detention and currently at the Supreme Court awaiting sentence. There are reports that he is being charged with inciting violence and will be detained for another 30 days, pending investigations.

The Council for Human Rights and Freedoms has confirmed that during the protest an international police officer from the Ukraine tried to shoot Albin Kurti, but was prevented by Salih Zyba. We do not know if the bullet he would have used was real or plastic.

This is how the UN treats nonviolent protest.

Our demonstration, 10th February

On Saturday at 14:30 we led our activists and people from all over Kosovo on a peaceful march through the centre of Prishtina. Our march was scheduled to begin at 14:00 but was delayed because the buses we organized for activists and people outside Prishtina were systematically stopped and searched by KFOR. One bus from Skënderaj was even taken to a KFOR base and held there while people's documents were checked. This is the real meaning of freedom of movement and freedom of assembly in Kosovo.

A large cordon of police blocked the road to UNMIK. We did not confront them because our route, as on the 28th November, was to pass the provisional government buildings first, and then continue on the main street in Prishtina past UNMIK, and then back to our office. When we arrived at the government buildings, a large cordon of riot police with tanks had barricaded the road. We stopped at the barricade.

There were a number of speeches. Then, Albin asked the police to open the road so that we could continue our march peacefully along the same route that we took on the 28th November. 'These are our streets' he said. If not, he said the people would continue to march and would break through their cordon. The police refused. Activists shouted 'clear the road, clear the road' and then removed the barriers, and linking arms, pushed into the police cordon. We had no weapons except our bodies.

Immediately, international special units began firing tear gas, and rubber and plastic bullets, including metal bullets coated in rubber. There was barely any distance between the police and protestors.

Ulpiana Lama, the Prime Minister's spokeswoman, described this as a proportional and

professional response. She is now on 'holiday'. Stephen Curtis, the International Police Commissioner, claimed that we intended to enter the government building and thus were responsible for creating conflict. It was never our intention to enter the building. We were unarmed! Albin Kurti clearly stated that we wanted the police to move so that we could continue our march. UNMIK police claimed the response was necessary because in our last protest, on 28th November, we damaged the government buildings. So, because we broke 17 windows two months ago, it is now necessary to kill us?

The police did not help the injured. They even fired tear gas canisters at three red cross ambulances when they were situated between the crowd and the police lines, preventing people from approaching them.

After the first attack, people regrouped near the Hotel Iliria. The police continued to advance, firing plastic and rubber bullets and tear gas. They used two types of tear gas. People were injured by canisters flying through the air, and by longer more deadly ones, shot horizontally. This battle continued for about 4 hours, until Albin Kurti asked people to go home and wait for the next organized demonstration.

Activists returned to our office where we immediately held a press conference to condemn the horrifying use of violence by the police. Half an hour after the media had left, the special police forced their way into our office without a warrant, sprayed tear gas inside the three rooms, and forced all the activists inside to lie on the ground in order to arrest Albin Kurti. A female activist, Shkurta Aliu tried to resist, and a special policeman struck her on the head with a tear gas canister. She was taken to emergency almost unconscious.

Candlelit vigil for the dead

On Sunday at 17:00 we organized a candlelit vigil for those who died and were injured in the demonstration. When we arrived, people had already begun to put candles at the very spot where the police began shooting at the crowd. Hundreds of people came to pay their respects and there were candles lit all along the street from the National Theatre to the Hotel Iliria. A line of activists stood bearing flaming torches and people wrote messages in a book of condolences.

Breaking into our offices

Whilst we were holding this vigil, the police, like thieves, broke into our offices across Kosovo. They broke the door of our office in Prishtina and took all of our computers. In the centres in other towns of Kosovo, they removed all material including membership lists, records of donations, newspapers and posters. In Vushtrri, the local people gathered round the office, shouting at the police to stop. We have received no warrant for these forced entries and no explanation for the removal of our property.