



**Lawyers' Committee  
For  
Human Rights**  
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**Human rights defenders meeting in Novi Pazar  
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Lawyers' Committee for Human Rights – YUCOM, OSCE and UN OHCHR organized a human rights defenders meeting at the OSCE offices in Novi Pazar. Meeting was attended by 12 representatives of human rights defenders from Novi Pazar, Priboj, Prijepolje and Tutin as well as representatives of Helsinki Committee for Human

Rights, OSCE, UN OHCHR and YUCOM.

Milan Antonijevic, director of YUCOM, reviewed briefly the goals of the meeting. As the number of the human rights defenders is decreasing as well as the sensibility of civil society organizations when it comes to protection of human rights, the second consulting meeting outside Belgrade, was held in Novi Pazar, with the aim to spread the network of human rights defenders. It is necessary to work towards creating mechanisms in support of human rights defenders in order to make their work undisturbed. At the first place Antonijevic pointed out the conclusions from the meeting in Nis, where a great number of cases against human rights defenders, which obstruct their work, was identified as a problem. In addition, the general goal of these and future consultations is the improvement of human rights defenders' activities, as well as creation of the recommendations which would be addressed to authorized state and international institutions and organizations, in order to improve the position of human rights defenders. In a broader sense, this gathering and the meetings which will follow are aimed to strengthen this segment of civic society organizations' actions and increase their recognizability and presence in the public.



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Marija Rauš, Human Rights Advisor at UN OHCHR, stated that activities, protection and status of human rights defenders represent priority for the OHCHR. In that sense, the UN Human Rights Office in Serbia, together with OSCE, supports the initiative of human rights defenders to convert their experiences into strategic document which would recommend instruments for dealing with the problems of human rights defenders in Serbia. One of the findings from previous meetings and work is that the HRDs and International Organizations from capital city of the Republic are not aware of the problems faced by human rights defenders at the local level, hence the goal of these consulting meetings is familiarizing with concrete problems that complicate or impede the work of local HRDs. Necessity for creating solidarity network between human rights organizations as well as active involvement of human rights defenders is apparent.



Ružica Banda, OSCE Mission to Serbia, reminded that their office has a close collaboration with non-governmental organizations and that OSCE recognizes protection and respect of human rights as the core issue of security, therefore it acknowledges the need for creating special mechanism for addressing issues of human rights defenders within OSCE, as it was created in 2007, within ODIHR, Warsaw.

Participating HRDs presented concrete problems they face on a daily basis. Although they have a good cooperation with the Commissioner for the protection of equality and the Ombudsman, they are facing clear problems of cooperation with the Ministry of interior and judiciary institutions when presenting the cases for protection or violations of human rights before courts. As stated, prosecution and police usually do not react on criminal reports or if they start criminal procedure usually it comes to a not guilty verdicts or statute of limitation. They had been facing pressures during attempts of monitoring trials for torture. Judicial organs lack adequate training on human rights and do not demonstrate necessary sensitivity in cases of breaches of Constitution and the rights guaranteed by international instruments.

There is a great pressure on the lawyers representing human rights defenders, therefore in most cases they resign during legal proceedings. Lawyers are commonly exposed to tremendous pressure of the society; as a consequence there is general unwillingness to engage in human rights protection. It is necessary to form a network of lawyers who would provide legal aid to the victims of human rights violation as well as to human rights defenders. Lawyers who would form this network should be independent and resistant to pressures. Legal Aid Network, that was used to be provided by YUCOM, was presented as a good example.



The lack of interest by media for the human rights issues was mentioned as another problem. Some human rights defenders faced personal attacks by media for their activities. Because of that it is necessary to organize training for the medias.

Unlike Belgrade and Nis, where there is a record of legal proceedings against human rights defenders' activists, in Sandzak there is no record of



such cases. However, personal threats made to human rights defenders are very frequent. Given that these are small communities, the threats have a great effect on human rights defenders and as a result defenders often resign or are unwilling to initiate legal proceedings for the protection of human rights in order to protect their families from threats and disapproval of the society.

Opinions and experiences regarding cooperation with the representatives of local-self government, are divided. One part of human rights defenders has a good cooperation while others claim that such cooperation does not exist or it is reduced to personal contacts and acquaintances.

As a result of the lack of financial and institutional support, a great number of non-governmental organizations is closing. They all agreed that with the greater support by the international organizations, better influence upon state institutions as well as organs of local-self government would be possible.



Participating representatives of the non-governmental organizations agreed that it is necessary to secure safe and undisturbed work of human rights defenders, that conditions at the local level are much more difficult than in Belgrade, that there is a necessity to secure funds for the work of non-governmental organizations as well as necessity of state organs to take into account reports provided by NGOs.

Conclusions from the second consulting meeting of human rights defenders in Novi Pazar:

- it is necessary to form a network of lawyers who would provide legal aid to the victims of human rights violations as well as to human rights defenders;
- a clear support by international organizations to the work of human rights defenders is necessary. Such support would also influence state institutions as well as organs of local-self government to realize the importance of defenders' work.
- attention of independent state institutions is necessary, namely establishment of the support system and systematic solutions for the victims of human rights violations, which would monitor state responses regarding some crucial issues such as violence against women and children, parental issues, as well as cultural and political rights (i.e. right to language);
- the role of media is of great importance for the work of human rights defenders in this region;
- there is a need for awareness raising and training in order to gain extensive support and sustainability of human rights defenders work.

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