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Concerning Police Actions and Lack of Information About Arrested Individuals

The Lawyers' Committee for Human Rights – YUCOM monitored the public gathering “See You on Vidovdan” held yesterday. Our observers on the ground documented both routine police procedures and incidents of police violence that have been widely circulated in the media and on social networks. Noted were the deployment of riot police units, unlawful and inappropriate use of batons and shields against citizens, as well as the use of irritant agents - most likely pepper spray or tear gas. Although some demonstrators did attack the police, the police response was indiscriminate and disproportionate, resulting in injuries to peaceful participants and media representatives. The most severe instances of police brutality were recorded when individuals engaged in passive resistance were forcibly detained.

What is particularly concerning is that YUCOM's emergency legal support line has received calls from citizens reporting that their family members or close ones were arrested and that their detention locations are unknown. In only a small number of cases were we able to locate the detained individuals. In most instances, our attempts to contact police stations were unsuccessful, as they either did not answer or stated they had no information. This lack of transparency prevented our attorneys at law from providing necessary assistance to the arrested individuals.

We call upon the Ministry of Internal Affairs that every individual has the right to inform a person of their choice about their location and the fact that they have been deprived of liberty. All citizens of the Republic of Serbia have the right to be informed of the location where their family members are being held when detained by state authorities. It is particularly alarming when families are left without information, while at the same time, images of bloodied and injured individuals circulate online and in the media.

Therefore, we call on that the Ministry of Internal Affairs:

- Immediately cease the disproportionate use of force against participants at all future public gatherings;
- Conduct thorough investigations into each individual case of force used and hold accountable any officials who exceeded their legal authority;
- Establish a functional call center with multiple phone lines to provide citizens and legal representatives with reliable information regarding the location of detained persons.

