



For immediate release – 29 September 2008

Bulgaria: Journalist in Critical Condition Following Brutal Beating

ARTICLE 19 is shocked at the vicious assault on Ognyan Stefanov on 22 September 2008, in the capital of Bulgaria, Sofia, while relieved to hear that he regained consciousness on the third day of his hospitalisation. Stefanov is a Bulgarian journalist and the chief editor of the online media outlet frognew.bg

“This attack appears to be motivated by a desire to silence Stefanov and, as such, it represents an assault not only on Stefanov, but also on the right to freedom of expression”, stated Dr. Agnès Callamard, Executive Director of ARTICLE 19. “We call on the Bulgarian authorities to do all they can to find the perpetrators and to bring them to justice.”

On Monday, 22 September, Ognian Stefanov was approached by several masked men dressed in black after leaving a restaurant in Sofia and was severely beaten with hammers. He was taken to hospital in a critical condition with broken limbs, severe haemorrhaging and brain concussion.

Stefanov has been associated with recent reports of high-level corruption among the Bulgarian police, the security services and the business world. He has also been linked with *Opasnite* (the Dangerous), an anonymous Internet site which was closed down at the beginning of September, following an investigation by the Bulgarian State National Security Agency (DANS) into its activities.

ARTICLE 19 is appalled by the barbarity of the attack, which is not only brutal but also sends a threatening signal to all investigative journalists, and especially those trying to shed light on corruption in the country. We note that States are under a positive obligation to protect those exercising the right to freedom of expression, and therefore the Bulgarian authorities should allocate adequate resources to investigating this heinous crime.

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- ARTICLE 19 is an independent human rights organisation that works around the world to protect and promote the right to freedom of expression. It takes its name from Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which guarantees free speech.