



Death threats against Mr. Branko Todorovic

BIH 001 / 0708 / OBS 128

Death threats

Bosnia-Herzegovina

July 29, 2008

The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, a joint programme of the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) and the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), requests your urgent intervention in the following situation in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Brief description of the situation:

The Observatory has been informed by reliable sources about death threats against Mr. **Branko Todorovic**, Executive Director of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Republika Srpska, and his family.

According to the information received, on July 22, 2008, around 2 p.m. an unknown man called the office of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Republika Srpska and said that “huge amounts of money have been given for the assassination of Mr. Branko Todorovic and his family as he has permanently heavily criticised powerful persons from the police and the prosecutors office”. In order to show the seriousness of this threat, the man listed many details and situation showing that he has carefully followed Mr. Todorovic and his family since couple of months.

The police was informed about this phone call and they advised the Helsinki Committee to be carefully, while the investigation is going on.

On July 27, 2008, Mr. Todorovic received another threat.

The Observatory recalls that throughout the last year, Mr. Todorovic and members of his family had already been intensively observed by a person, and the police was always informed about that. By the end of May 2008, this person tried to directly attack Mr. Todorovic with his car. Police investigation in regard to this case is also going on. In 2004, the Observatory had already documented threats against Mr. Todorovic (See background information and Observatory Annual Report 2004).

The Observatory expresses its deepest concern about these death threats against Mr. Branko Todorovic, and urges the authorities in Bosnia-Herzegovina to guarantee in all circumstances his physical and psychological integrity as well as all human rights defenders in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Furthermore, and in accordance with article 11 of the European Union (EU) Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders, the Observatory urges the EU missions in Bosnia-Herzegovina to urge authorities of Bosnia-Herzegovina to comply with the relevant international norms and standards and, in particular, the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders in order to create an environment where human rights defenders can operate freely.

Background information:

On February 7, 2004, Mr. Branko Todorovic had received death threats on his telephone answering machine. These threats accused him of being a NATO agent and warned him that if he went into hiding his family would be targeted.

This followed the publication of an article on February 3, 2004 in the Banja Luka newspaper Nezavisne Novine, in which Mr. Todorovic had accused the Minister of the Interior, Mr. Zoran Djeric, of a lack of political will in the arrest of persons suspected of war crimes. Mr. Todorovic had also denounced, in a television broadcast on the RTRS channel on February 6, 2004, the lack of result in the investigation of the aggression of Mr. Mladen Mimic, President of the Milici Citizens' Association, who had been attacked in March 2003. On February 6, 2004, Mr. Dragan Jerinic, Editor-in-chief of Nezavisne Novine, had also received death threats on his mobile phone, warning him he would be killed if he continued to publish Mr. Todorovic's writings.

On February 8, 2004, the Minister of the Interior stated that the police denied any involvement in these threats.

On September 26, 2004, the office of the Helsinki Committee had been burgled. Hard disks containing information on ongoing investigations were stolen together with a camera. However valuable equipment, including new computers that contained no files on the Committee's activities, had been left untouched. On November 22, 2004, the home of Mr. Todorovic in Bijeljina had also been burgled, but nothing was stolen.

Actions requested:

Please write to the authorities in Bosnia-Herzegovina, urging them to:

0. Guarantee in all circumstances the physical and psychological integrity of Mr. Branko Todorovic, his relatives and all human rights defenders in Bosnia-Herzegovina;
0. Order a thorough and impartial investigation into the above-mentioned threats, in order to identify

all those responsible, bring them before a civil competent and impartial tribunal and apply to them the penal sanctions provided by the law;

0. Put an end to the harassment against all human rights defenders in Bosnia-Herzegovina;
0. Conform with the provisions of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on December 9, 1998, especially its Article 1, which states that “everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, to promote and to strive for the protection and realisation of human rights and fundamental freedoms at the national and international levels”, Article 11 which reads that “everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, to the lawful exercise of his or her occupation or profession” and Article 12.2, which provides that “the State shall take all necessary measures to ensure the protection by the competent authorities of everyone, individually and in association with others, against any violence, threats, retaliation, *de facto* or *de jure* adverse discrimination, pressure or any other arbitrary action as a consequence of his or her legitimate exercise of the rights referred to in the present Declaration”;
0. Ensure in all circumstances respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in accordance with international human rights standards and international instruments ratified by Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Addresses:

- Mr. Nikola Špiri , Chairman of the Council of Ministers, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Fax: +387 33 211 464. Email: mmicevska@vijeceministara.gov.ba
- Mr. Nedžad Branković , Prime Minister of the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Office of the Prime Minister, Federation Government, Alipasina 41, Sarajevo, Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Phone: +387 33 650 457. Fax: +387 33 664 816
- Mr. Muhidin Ali , Minister of Interior, Ministry of Interior, Federation Government, Mehmeda Spahića 7, Sarajevo, Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Phone: +387 33 280-020. Fax: +387 33 207-606.
- Mr. Feliks Vidović , Minister of Justice, Ministry of Justice, Federation Government, Valtera Perića 15, Sarajevo, Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Phone: +387 33 213-151. Fax: +387 33 213-152 lok. 358
- Permanent Mission of the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina to the United Nations in Geneva, Rue Lamartine 22 bis, 1203 Geneva, Switzerland. Fax: + 41 22 345 88 89. Email: mission.bosnia-herzegovina@ties.itu.int

Please also write to the diplomatic mission or embassy of Bosnia-Herzegovina in your respective country as well as to the EU diplomatic missions or embassies in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Geneva-Paris, July 29, 2008

Kindly inform us of any action undertaken quoting the code of this appeal in your reply.

The Observatory, a FIDH and OMCT venture, is dedicated to the protection of Human Rights Defenders and aims to offer them concrete support in their time of need. The Observatory was the winner of the 1998 Human Rights Prize of the French Republic.

To contact the Observatory, call the emergency line:

E-mail: Appeals@fidh-omct.org

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L'OMCT a son siège à Genève, en Suisse. Elle coordonne le réseau SOS-Torture composé de 282 organisations régionales et internationales dans 93 pays sur cinq continents.

Contact : omct@omct.org