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**PROMOTION AND PROTECTION OF ALL HUMAN RIGHTS,
CIVIL, POLITICAL, ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL
RIGHTS, INCLUDING THE RIGHT TO DEVELOPMENT**

**Report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General
on the situation of human rights defenders, Hina Jilani**

Addendum

MISSION TO THE FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA* **

* The summary of this mission report is being circulated in all official languages. The report itself contained in the annex to the summary is being circulated in the language of submission only.

** This document is submitted late to reflect the most recent information.

Summary

This report presents the findings and recommendations of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on the situation of human rights defenders on her mission to The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia from 23 to 25 September 2007.

The purpose of the follow-up mission was to evaluate progress and challenges in implementing the recommendations of the Special Representative four years after the report on her first visit.

The Special Representative notes a number of improvements since 2003, in particular in the increased capacity and professionalism of human rights defenders, the adoption of legislation relevant to the work of defenders, and the positive role of international organizations in strengthening human rights defenders both through capacity building and funding.

The situation of human rights defenders still has to be improved in several areas to comply with the Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, known as the Declaration on human rights defenders. The Special Representative addresses a number of recommendations to the Government, human rights defenders and the international community to facilitate a better implementation of the Declaration.

The following table compares the situation of human rights defenders as assessed during the first visit in 2003 with the assessment made during the second visit in 2007. It provides a schematic overview of developments that have occurred in four years, which were the main focus of the follow-up mission. The table does not summarize all the findings contained in this report, particularly those not directly related to issues and concerns raised in the first mission.

Comparative situation of human rights defenders 2003 and 2007

1st mission – 2003^a	Follow-up mission – 2007
The context in which defenders work	
<p>The implementation of the Ohrid Agreement was the political priority (paragraphs. 10-13^b).</p>	<p>In 2007 efforts to integrate into the EU dominate the political agenda. The consequences of the prominence of the EU agenda are tangible in the overall situation of both human rights and civil society in the country (paragraph 11^c). Political will and the genuine commitment of national public authorities are however fundamental to ensuring that achievements are sustainable and human rights priorities are not empty programmatic objectives with a view to EU accession (paragraph 16).</p>
<p>The decentralization process sponsored by the Ohrid Agreement presents concerns over the existing means of local authorities to fulfil their human rights responsibilities. The concentration of defenders in Skopje limits their capacity to do human rights monitoring at the local level (paragraph 15).</p>	<p>While this remains a concern, this has been partly redressed with capacity building programmes specifically aimed at strengthening local civil society organizations and reducing the monitoring gap at the local level. Another positive development is the structure of the Office of the Ombudsman, who has six regional offices in the country. However, more awareness-raising is needed to overcome the still deficient collaboration of local authorities with the</p>

^a E/CN.4/2004/94/Add.2.

^b All references to paragraph numbers in the left-hand column of the table relate to E/CN.4/2004/94/Add.2.

^c All references to paragraph numbers in the right-hand column of the table relate to the present report.

	Office of the Ombudsman. Municipalities should in principle fund civil society organizations but this is not actually happening yet (paragraphs 17-20).
Discrimination on the basis of ethnicity is a root cause of many human rights violations (paragraph 19).	Discrimination along ethnic lines remains a concern. Progress in the availability of higher education opportunities for ethnic Albanians as well as pre-employment training for minority public servants are positive developments (paragraphs 21-22).
Intention of the Government to give more emphasis to human rights education in the school curriculum (paragraph 22).	Ad hoc activities but limited concerted action taken to implement the Plan of Action for the first phase of the World Programme for Human Rights Education (paragraph 23).
Human rights defenders	
A majority of human rights defenders require a greater degree of knowledge of international human rights standards, methodological skills and expertise in developing and implementing human rights strategies (paragraph 41).	A major area of progress is the improved capacity and skills of human rights defenders in terms of expertise in human rights methodologies, strategies and planning frameworks, advocacy and communication skills among others. Overall their discourse is more articulate and focused, as it is backed by more years of experience (paragraph 24).
Strong thematic areas of work are women's rights and the human rights of Roma communities (paragraphs 26 and 28)	These two areas of work are confirmed as strong among human rights defenders. Rights of persons with disability acquired prominence and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex rights are an emerging area (paragraph 26).

<p>Human rights organizations are largely concentrated in Skopje with a small presence outside the capital (paragraph 47).</p>	<p>Still mainly so, although there have been some improvements. The training provided by international organizations to human rights organizations working outside the capital has contributed to this improvement (paragraph 27).</p>
<p>Women defenders are numerous and especially active at the community level (paragraph 28).</p>	<p>Women's organizations continue to be perceived as the strongest civil society movement, with presence at the local level and the highest percentage of citizen's participation (paragraph 29).</p>
<p>Women defenders work more on awareness-raising and lobbying rather than on protection and monitoring.</p>	<p>Still mainly so but more reporting activities with the presentation of shadow reports to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (paragraph 30).</p>
<p>Positive evaluation of the training provided by international organizations to human rights defenders (paragraph 40).</p>	<p>Human rights defenders assessed positively the training received, which helped them in getting recognition for their role and in being more vocal. Defenders expressed the need for follow-up training (paragraph 35).</p>
<p>Limited capacity of defenders to work on monitoring and protection (paragraph 43).</p>	<p>Some improvements in monitoring activities and better level of networking with regional and international coalitions, but the capacity of defenders to pursue cases is still limited (paragraph 36-38).</p>
<p>Politicization of human rights organizations damages the image and work of defenders (paragraph 46).</p>	<p>This is still a concern, together with the limited transparency and accountability of civil society organizations vis-à-vis the public. There are ongoing initiatives within the civil society organization</p>

	<p>movement to promote transparency and to improve their public image (paragraphs 40-42).</p>
<p>Concern about the very limited extent to which human rights defenders create formal networks amongst themselves and coordinate their activities (paragraph 39).</p>	<p>Improvements in creating umbrella organizations to coordinate work on thematic areas and to pursue common objectives. The Civic Platform of Macedonia is an attempt to create a space to communicate and coordinate civil society actions. Despite these improvements, human rights organizations still do not form a community that would be in a position to protect defenders (paragraphs 45-49).</p>
<p>Human rights defenders face security concerns mostly linked to the types of issues they address, including corruption, combating organized crime, respect for civil and political rights in areas formerly affected by the conflict, trafficking in persons and the collection of weapons. There have also been a number of attacks on defenders because of their ethnicity (paragraph 72).</p>	<p>Overall, human rights defenders enjoy a good level of security and attacks and threats to their security are not systematic. However, defenders working on some thematic areas are more exposed to violations. This is the case for defenders working on anti-corruption cases and minority issues, such as ethnicity and/or religion (paragraph 50).</p>
<p>The almost complete dependence of defenders on international donors for funding is a major concern in terms of the long-term sustainability of their work (paragraph 32).</p>	<p>Dependence on international donors is still the reality for most human rights organizations in the country. International funding is shrinking and resources available at the national level are not enough (paragraph 55).</p>
<p>Donors are not interested in funding projects identified by defenders as their</p>	<p>With few exceptions, international donors are unresponsive to funding requests for</p>

priorities (paragraph 68).	priority issues identified by defenders (paragraph 56).
A major concern is that defenders are not exempt from tax (paragraph. 35).	The tax regime continues to be a major obstacle to the development of civil society. The Strategy for Government Cooperation with the Civil Society Sector envisages reforming the tax framework to provide tax benefits for civil society organizations (paragraph 57).
An enabling environment	
The Special Representative recommended the ratification of the Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (paragraph 79 (a)).	The country has not ratified the Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families. It has, however, ratified the two Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, and on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (paragraph 58).
Freedom of expression is perceived as generally very good (paragraph 53).	The overall positive assessment of the respect for freedom of expression is confirmed, although there is a difficult environment for defenders working on anti-corruption or minority issues, or for those taking positions critical of the Government (paragraph 60).
The absence of a law on the right to access information is a concern	A law on access to information entered into force in September 2006. While this

(paragraph 52).	is a positive legislative development, its unsatisfactory implementation is a concern (paragraphs 61-62).
Freedom of association is respected (paragraph 54).	The same positive assessment is confirmed, with the exception of the limitations and constraints on association in trade unions in the private sector in companies with foreign capital, particularly in the textile sector (paragraph 63).
Consultation with human rights defenders takes place on an ad hoc basis only and at the discretion of the authorities concerned (paragraph. 51).	Consultation processes still take place on an ad hoc basis. The adoption of the Strategy for Government Cooperation with the Civil Society Sector for 2007-2011 is a welcome development and has the potential to institutionalize consultation with civil society if there is the political will to implement it. The Government is well aware of the need for the local authorities and the Parliament to follow the same approach in order that the institutionalization of the consultation processes takes place at all levels (paragraphs 65-70).
Police officers have been accused of committing abuses. The absence of a transparent complaint procedure encourages impunity. The ethnic and gender composition of the police is a concern (paragraph 59).	Several improvements can be registered in the role of the police: (a) the establishment of an internal complaint procedure; (b) a more ethnically diverse police; (c) implementation of human rights training programmes for the police; (d) the ongoing establishment of community police; (e) an overall

	<p>improved attitude towards citizens, with the exception of Roma who continue to be victims of the abusive behaviour of the police (paragraph 72). Concerns on police action include: (a) the abuses committed by the Alfi Unit of the police and the difficulty of investigating them; (b) a deficient internal control mechanism; (c) the absence of an external control mechanism; and (d) the denial of access to police stations for human rights defenders (paragraphs 71-77).</p>
<p>The Special Representative recommended the adoption of the law establishing an independent court budget (paragraph. 79 (a)). The judiciary has a significant backlog of cases and the justice is slow (paragraph 64).</p>	<p>The law on the independent court budget entered into force in 2004. According to representatives of the judiciary, it needs amendments to further improve the independence of the judiciary. Lengthy duration of judicial proceedings continues to be a problem, although some progress can be registered (paragraphs 78-79).</p>
<p>Limited collaboration and responsiveness of public authorities with the Ombudsman (paragraph 24).</p>	<p>There have been improvements in the collaboration of public authorities, particularly with the introduction of quarterly reports on governmental cooperation with the Ombudsman and the circulars of the Ministry of Interior instructing the police to collaborate with the Ombudsman. However, improvements in this area are still needed (paragraphs 82-85).</p>
<p>The adoption of legislation to strengthen the inspection functions of the</p>	<p>Legislation was adopted in 2003 but is not considered in compliance with the</p>

Ombudsman was envisaged (paragraph 25).	Paris principles for national human rights institutions (paragraph 82).
The Office of the Ombudsman needs greater support from the international community (paragraph 25).	The Special Representative welcomes the support provided by international organizations especially in the area of capacity-building (paragraph 86).

Annex

**REPORT OF THE SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL
ON THE SITUATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS, HINA JILANI, ON HER
MISSION TO THE FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA
(23 to 25 September 2007)**

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Introduction

1. The Special Representative conducted a mission to The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia from 23 to 25 September 2007. The Special Representative would like to thank the Government for extending her the invitation to visit the country and for the collaboration provided to undertake a fruitful visit. The Special Representative expresses her gratitude to the United Nations Resident Coordinator and her office, particularly the human rights adviser, for the excellent support provided in the organization of the visit.
2. The mission to The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia concluded a visit to the region that included Serbia and Kosovo, visited from 17 to 21 September 2007. The findings and recommendations on the visit to the Republic of Serbia, including Kosovo, are presented in a separate report.¹
3. The visit to the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is a follow-up mission aimed at identifying progress and challenges in the situation of human rights defenders 4 years after the visit undertaken by the Special Representative from 27 to 30 January 2003.²
4. The Special Representative had 25 meetings during her visit to the country. All meetings were held in Skopje. She met with Government representatives, members of the judiciary and the Parliament, the Ombudsperson, the international community, and human rights defenders. In particular, she met with the Speaker of the Macedonian Parliament and other Members of the Parliament, the Minister of Interior, the Minister of Justice, the Deputy Minister of Education, representatives of the Government in charge of integration with the European Union (EU), representatives of the General Secretariat of the Government in charge of cooperation with civil society, the President of the Constitutional Court, the President of the Judicial Council, the Ombudsman, the EU Special Representative and Head of Delegation of the European Commission, the Head of Mission and other representatives of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), representatives of the Information Office of the Council of Europe, members of the United Nations country team and a group of international donors. She

¹ A/HRC/7/028/Add.3.

² See E/CN.4/2004/94/Add.2.

also met non-governmental organizations (NGOs), journalists, representatives of trade unions and the Macedonian Bar Association, and individual human rights defenders. A press conference was held at the end of the visit.

I. THE CONTEXT IN WHICH HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS WORK

A. Methodology

5. The visit to The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia was a follow-up mission. The purpose was therefore not to make a full assessment of the situation of human rights defenders but to rather evaluate progress and challenges in implementing the recommendations of the Special Representative four years after her last report.

6. The 2004 report was used as the basis to assess progress and gaps in the subsequent four years in the present report. To facilitate the assessment, a matrix was prepared containing a list of over 60 issues, findings and recommendations detailed in a schematic manner. For each item, information on developments that occurred between 2003 and 2007 was sought before and during the mission. This allowed immediate identification of areas in which progress has been more evident, versus other areas which have stagnated more.

7. The assessment undertaken during the visit, however, went beyond the issues raised in the 2004 report to allow new developments to be captured or concerns that were not covered in the first report to be taken into account, to provide an updated overview of the situation of human rights defenders.

B. The pace of change

8. “After your report, nothing changed”, said a human rights defender to the Special Representative. The impatience of those in the front line for the promotion and protection of human rights to see the progress they are striving for is justified. It is in itself a motivating factor to continue defending human rights with renewed energy and commitment.

9. While the Special Representative understands the frustration of human rights defenders who have not seen the improvements expected and shares their disappointment in several areas that will be analysed in more detail, she nevertheless recognizes a number of positive developments since 2003. In particular, she is impressed by the progress made by defenders themselves in terms of their increased level of capacity, professionalism, expertise on human rights methodologies, as well as more clarity about their objectives and strategies for achieving them.

C. From the Ohrid Agreement to the European Union

10. While the political context of the 2003 visit of the Special Representative was marked by the Ohrid Agreement, which provided a framework for addressing the problems that prompted the armed conflict of 2001, in 2007 the efforts to integrate into the EU dominate the political agenda. This is a major difference from the previous visit and the prominence of the EU agenda had had a tangible impact on the overall situation of both human rights and civil society in the country.

11. On 17 December 2005, the Council of the European Union decided to recognize The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia as a candidate for EU membership. Since 2004, European partnerships have been adopted with the countries of the Western Balkans as a means to realize progressive integration with the EU. These Accession Partnerships establish short- and medium-term priorities that the competent State authorities are requested to meet to advance towards EU accession. The European Commission regularly monitors progress in the implementation of these priorities.

12. The priorities set forth in the European and Accession Partnerships include human rights priorities, as well as priorities in areas that have direct influence on the environment in which human rights defenders operate.

13. Human rights priorities for EU accession include, inter alia: (a) full compliance with the European Convention on Human Rights and the recommendations made by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment;

(b) full implementation of the rules applicable to ethics, internal control, professional and human rights standards in law enforcement agencies, the judiciary and prison administration, including regular training; (c) establishment of effective mechanisms to identify, pursue and penalize all forms of discrimination by State and non-State bodies against individuals and groups; (d) upgrading and implementation of the strategy on equitable representation of non-majority communities; and (e) further implementation of the strategy on equitable representation of non-minority communities.³

14. The European and Accession Partnerships also include a priority on promoting the active participation of civil society. Compliance with this priority prompted the adoption of the 2007-2011 Strategy for Government Cooperation with the Civil Society Sector (see paragraphs 67-71 below).

15. The human rights priorities for accession to the EU, as well as other requirements that are instrumental to the work of defenders, such as the involvement of civil society in public administration, cooperation with the Ombudsman or collaboration with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), are definitely a powerful engine to further the human rights agenda and progress can be registered in several areas as a consequence of EU requirements and their monitoring. “Whenever we want to move faster, we lobby the EU”, commented a human rights defender to underline the effectiveness of having the backing of the EU in pursuing human rights objectives.

16. While recognizing the benefits of the EU framework in making progress on human rights, the Special Representative warns that political will and the genuine commitment and participation of national public authorities are fundamental to ensuring that achievements in this area are sustainable and that human rights priorities are not empty programmatic objectives in the progress towards EU accession.

³ Commission of the European Communities, Proposal for a Council decision on the principles, priorities and conditions contained in the Accession Partnership with the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and repealing Decision 2006/57/EC, COM (2007) 659, 6 November 2007. See also Council Decision of 30 January 2006 on the principles, priorities and conditions contained in the European Partnership with the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and repealing Decision 2004/518/EC, 2006/57/EC.

D. Decentralization

17. In the 2004 report, some concerns were expressed as to the possible negative consequences for human rights defenders triggered by the ongoing decentralization process envisaged by the Ohrid Agreement and supported by the EU. With the local authorities assuming more functions and competencies, the potential for committing human rights abuses at the local level had increased, as had the need to monitor local institutions. As the bulk of human rights defenders were based in Skopje, their monitoring capacity at the local level was considered not to be strong enough to address the human rights challenges posed by decentralization.

18. While this remains a concern, the Special Representative welcomes the capacity-building programmes specifically aimed at strengthening local civil society organizations and reducing the monitoring gap at the local level.

19. Another positive development is the structure of the Office of the Ombudsman, who has six regional offices in the country. Regional offices facilitate access to the Ombudsman at the local level. However, more awareness-raising and training on the role and functions of the Ombudsman is needed among local authorities, whose collaboration with the Office of the Ombudsman is still deficient.

20. With the decentralization process, municipalities should in principle also fund civil society organizations but this is not actually happening yet.

E. Progress and setbacks in the overall human rights situation as identified in the 2004 report

21. In the 2004 report, concerns over the overall human rights situation mainly referred to discrimination on the basis of ethnicity. Non-discrimination and equitable representation of non-majority communities remain among the outstanding human rights priorities established by the EU.

22. Progress can be registered in the availability of higher education opportunities for ethnic Albanians as well as pre-employment training programmes for minority public servants. This should give better employment opportunities for minority communities.

23. Despite some efforts to improve education opportunities for Roma, Turkish and Vlach minorities, there has been no tangible progress in this area. It is regrettable that the Ministry of Education has taken ad hoc but not concerted action to implement the Plan of Action for the first phase of the World Programme for Human Rights Education (2005-2009). Human rights education is not only about introducing human rights in school curricula. It is also about inclusion as opposed to exclusion and marginalization, it is about equality as opposed to discrimination and stigmatization. The Plan of Action is a policy framework that would be instrumental in addressing and redressing discrimination practices in the country.

II. HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

24. The major area of progress identified by the Special Representative is the improved capacity and expertise of human rights defenders on human rights methodologies, strategies and planning frameworks, advocacy and communication skills, among others. Overall their discourse is more articulate and focused, as it is backed by more years of experience.

25. Human rights defenders had frank discussions with the Special Representative on their strengths and weaknesses. The Special Representative considers the openness to self-criticism showed by defenders in her discussions with them as an indication of maturity and self-confidence that was not there four years ago.

26. In terms of thematic areas of work, some trends identified in the 2004 report were confirmed, such as the strength of the women's movement, the steady growth of capacity and activities carried out by defenders working on the rights of Roma. New thematic areas are now on the agenda of human rights defenders. Work on the human rights of persons with disabilities has become prominent in the country. Another emerging area is the rights of lesbians, gays, bisexual, transgender and inter-sexual persons (LGBTI). While the difficult access to public authorities for NGOs working on LGBTI rights is a concern, the Special Representative notes as a positive development the solid work of defenders on LGBTI rights, who are well-integrated

among human rights organizations, formed a coalition to pursue improvements in the legislation, and achieved changes in media ethics banning homophobic positions.

27. In terms of geographic distribution, human rights organizations continue to be mainly concentrated in Skopje, as was noted at the time of the 2003 visit, although there have been some improvements thanks to the training provided by international organizations to human rights organizations working outside the capital.

28. In 2003, there were 5,289 civil society organizations registered in Macedonia, 43 per cent of which were registered in Skopje. According to the Directory of Civic Organizations, the number of active organizations is far smaller and amounts to 1,512, of which 23 per cent are active in Skopje.⁴

A. Women human rights defenders

29. “The women’s movement has such a large social capital that it does not need the support of the international community to operate”, commented a defender. Women’s organizations are considered the strongest sector of civil society. The empowerment of women is perceived as one of the areas in which civil society organizations have achieved the most. While there is overall a relatively low percentage of citizen participation in civil society activities, the highest rate of participation is in women’s organizations. Women’s organizations have a relatively large presence throughout the country, as compared to other organizations, which tend to be concentrated in towns and in Skopje in particular.

30. Women’s organizations have several examples of networks, mutual cooperation and lobbying. For example, the Macedonian Women Lobby (MZL), established as an informal movement in 2000, is a coalition of leading women from civil society organizations and unions, political parties, the media, public authorities, as well as women who are experts in different fields. MZL played a role in the inclusion of gender quotas in elections, commended by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).⁵

⁴ Macedonian Center for International Cooperation, *An Assessment of Macedonian Civil Society: 15 Years of Transition – A Country Moving towards Citizen Participation*, Skopje, 2006, p. 34.

⁵ CEDAW/C/MKD/CO/3, para. 25.

31. The Union of Women Organizations of Macedonia (UWOM) is a network of 64 independent women organizations throughout the country with members of different ethnic, national, and religious affiliation.

32. Women's organizations also participated in the review undertaken by the CEDAW Committee of The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and submitted two shadow reports to the Committee, one on the overall situation of women's rights and another on Roma women.

B. Achievement in building the capacity of human rights defenders

33. In 2003, the Special Representative made a positive assessment of the training programmes for human rights defenders conducted by international organizations, including the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), OSCE and the Council of Europe.⁶

34. OSCE and the Council of Europe continue to provide training to defenders, while the OHCHR project ended in 2006. Assistance is provided through a national human rights adviser in the office of the Resident Coordinator but without a direct engagement in project activities. Support to human rights defenders provided in this framework includes, inter alia, the establishment of a civil society focal point within the United Nations Country Team in 2006 aimed at facilitating relationships between the Team and civil society organizations, the dissemination of information on and facilitation of access to funds for human rights activities implemented by grass-roots civil society organizations, such as the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture and the United Nations Voluntary Fund on Contemporary Forms of Slavery.

35. Defenders evaluated positively the training provided to them by international organizations. They deemed the training useful in giving them recognition and in encouraging them to be vocal. They also considered it an important opportunity to get to know each other and build contacts. They pointed to the need for follow-up training.

⁶ E/CN.4/2004/94/Add.2, para. 40.

36. The Special Representative noted some improvement in the capacity of human rights organizations to work on monitoring and protection, including by using international and regional human rights mechanisms. The shadow reports submitted to CEDAW are an example.

37. There is also a better level of networking through international and regional coalitions, which facilitate participation in international settings and give them access to capacity-building programmes available outside the country.

38. However, most NGOs do not have the capacity to pursue cases until the end among those they take up in their protection activities. This requires resources, including legal expertise, which most NGOs still do not have. The inability of defenders to seek remedies and redress is also due to the insufficient mechanisms that they have at their disposal for their protection activities. For instance, access to information is not granted in many crucial areas, including on violations committed by the police. The absence of an external oversight mechanism is another obstacle in the activities of defenders that report on alleged violations committed by the police (see paragraph 75 below).

C. The independence of civil society organizations and public perception of their role and performance

39. A survey among communities' samples showed a relatively low level of public trust in the institutions, including civil society organizations.⁷ However, when it comes to concrete services to the people, they are considered more helpful in resolving the problems of communities than Government institutions.⁸

40. Concerns about the independence of civil society organizations from political parties were expressed both by some defenders as well as public authorities. Subjective

politicization of civil society organizations is considered a problem that affects the credibility of civil society and contributes to a negative image in the media and public opinion.

⁷ Civil society organizations rank second in public trust, after the armed forces and before business, media and Government and political parties. Macedonian Center for International Cooperation, *An Assessment of Macedonian Civil Society...* (see footnote 4 above), p. 105.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

41. Some organizations were aware of their own responsibility in creating the negative image they have in media and in public opinion, and pointed to the need to develop media strategies to improve the quality of media coverage of human rights and of the work of defenders.

42. Other organizations identified a lack of or limited transparency of civil society organizations as a problem of Macedonian civil society that weakens their image in public opinion. Only a small number of organizations provide public access to their sources of funding. While most of civil society's funding relations are with foreign donors and therefore primary accountability is towards them, transparency towards the general public is an important element of integrity and credibility. Gaining the trust of citizens can also have financial benefits in the medium and long term, as sources of funding will have to be more and more sought at the local level to ensure financial sustainability.

43. Under the motto "Together for Transparency" some organizations decided to voluntarily publish their annual reports, financial reports and independent audit reports.

44. The Special Representative acknowledges that issues of transparency and credibility must be addressed by civil society, in particular the community of human rights organizations. However, she has observed that in many transitional societies a growing civil society with relatively more resources at its command and a focus on the promotion of rights that may not yet be fully understood or respected, may encounter a level of resistance from social and State institutions. This can lead to misperceptions which may arise because of the nature of the State and society rather than as a consequence solely of the shortcomings of the groups striving for rights. She, therefore, believes that removal of misperceptions as well as building a more positive image of human rights organizations and defenders is a collective responsibility, requiring contributions from State institutions, social actors and defenders themselves. This is a crucial undertaking. Support for the work and activities of defenders has a direct relation to the level of respect for human rights in any country.

D. Networking

45. In her 2004 report, the Special Representative expressed her concern about the limited level of networking and coordination among defenders.

46. Some improvements can be registered in this area. Umbrella organizations on the basis of thematic area or target group (women, Roma, disability) coordinate the work of several organizations. As mentioned, the women's movement is the best organized and with a large presence on the ground.

47. Other initiatives are aimed at combining efforts on common human rights objectives. This is the case of the coalition "All for Fair Trials" established in 2003 with the support of OSCE. The coalition represents a network of 22 independent NGOs engaged in promoting respect for international standards on fair trials.⁹ A more recent initiative was the establishment in 2007 of a coalition of NGOs working on a proposal for an anti-discrimination law.

48. Another coordinating entity is the Civic Platform of Macedonia established in March 2004. It is composed of 36 organizations that wanted to create an open space to improve communication, coordination and cooperation of civil society and facilitate the establishment of partner relations with the Government, the business sector and international organizations.

49. Despite these efforts in improving coordination among civil society organizations, the Special Representative notes that human rights organizations still do not form a real human rights community that can voice the positions of human rights defenders more forcefully and protect defenders. Human rights organizations still do not see it as part of their role as defenders to systematically protect defenders at risk, those who are marginalized or are facing difficult battles. The Special Representative is encouraged by some examples of solidarity expressed by human rights organizations when defenders had been unfairly attacked by the media or politicians. She hopes that these examples will gain consistency and pave the way for a solid human rights community in Macedonia.

⁹ <http://www.all4fairtrials.org.mk>.

E. Defenders at risk

50. Overall, human rights defenders enjoy a good level of security and attacks and threats to their security are not systematic. However, defenders working on some thematic areas are more exposed to violations. This is the case for defenders working on anti-corruption cases and on minority issues, be they ethnic, religious or both.

51. The Special Representative was informed of a recent case of a human rights defender assaulted and insulted with racist comments because of his mixed marriage and his position on the law of religious communities. Fifteen NGOs intervened to condemn the attack and expressed their solidarity with the defender. These fifteen NGOs were in turn discredited by the media and some political parties, which labelled them as “*wahabists*”.

52. On anti-corruption work, the Special Representative followed up the case of Mr Zoran Bozinovski, an investigative journalist working on anti-corruption cases. The attacks against Mr Bozinovski were already taken up in her 2004 report¹⁰ and his situation was then followed by communications sent on three occasions in the following years.¹¹

53. Over the last few years, Mr Bozinovski has faced numerous defamation legal suits, reportedly orchestrated by those whose supposed corruption he was investigating. He reported that the intervention of the Special Representative through the communications on his situation that she sent to the Macedonian Government contributed to saving him from serving a three-month prison sentence. Mr Bozinovski explained how the legal suits against him are meant to impede him in investigating corruption and are reactivated as soon as he touches sensitive issues in his investigative work. The journalists’ association has not been able to defend him and the only support he has received came essentially from international organizations.

54. While the relentless judicial prosecution of Mr Bozinovski might be an isolated example and not a systematic targeting of a journalist, the fact that the support he received came from the international community and not from national organizations illustrates how human rights

¹⁰ E/CN.4/2004/94/Add.2, para. 74.

¹¹ In 2004 (E/CN.4/2005/101/Add.1, paras. 530-532) and in 2006 (A/HRC/4/37/Add.1, paras. 410-412).

organizations are still not able to assess facts and to act as a community of defenders that systematically protects and expresses solidarity to defenders under attack or facing difficulties. The Special Representative welcomes the subsequent information provided by the Government on this point, i.e. the recent adoption of the Code of Best Practices for financial support of citizens' associations and foundations.¹²

F. Funding

55. Funding of human rights organizations continues to come mostly from international donors. This was already a concern in 2003 in terms of the medium and long-term sustainability of the work of defenders when international funding would significantly reduce. The shrinking of international funding is even more real in 2007. This is happening at a time when alternative funding at the national level is still not available in sufficient quantities. The Special Representative is also concerned that the Government has not established transparent criteria and procedures for granting Government funding to civil society organizations.

56. With few exceptions, international donors continue to be less than responsive to funding requests for programmes and activities on the basis of the priorities identified by defenders themselves. Donors tend rather to support what they consider priorities.

57. As already observed in 2003¹³ the tax regime is a major obstacle to the development of civil society. The Strategy for Government Cooperation with the Civil Society Sector (see paragraph 67 below) recognizes the need to reconsider the present tax framework and envisages reforming it to extend exemption from tax to civil society organizations in line with EU regulations and to foster the development of such organizations.¹⁴

¹² Published in the Official Gazette No. 130/2007.

¹³ E/CN.4/2004/94/Add.2, para. 35.

¹⁴ Government of the Republic of Macedonia, *Strategy for Government Cooperation with the Civil Society Sector, 2007-2011*, Skopje, January 2007, pp.22 and 23.

III. AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

A. International human rights instruments

58. Since 2003, there has been progress in the ratification of international human rights instruments. In particular, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia has ratified the following instruments: the two Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, and on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

59. The Special Representative recommended the ratification of the Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, which did not occur. The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia has signed and is taking steps to ratify the other core international human rights standards, namely the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, for whose ratification a law is being drafted; the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; and the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, for which a pre-ratification analysis is under way.

B. Freedom of expression, access to information and freedom of association

60. The Special Representative confirms the overall positive assessment of the respect of freedom of expression that she already expressed in 2003, although she noted a more difficult environment for defenders working on anti-corruption, minority issues, both ethnic and religious, and for those taking positions critical of the Government.

61. The Special Representative welcomes the adoption of a law on access to information, which responded to one of her earlier recommendations.¹⁵ The law has been in force since 1 September 2006. It established an independent five-member Commission to oversee the implementation of the law.

¹⁵ E/CN.4/2004/94/Add.2, para. 79 (a).

62. A more effective implementation of the law has, however, yet to be achieved. A monitoring project on the implementation of the law reported that only 35 per cent of requests are answered. When information is not provided, it does not happen on the basis of the established procedures. In 65 per cent of cases the information is provided as soon as the refusal to provide information is appealed before the Commission. This indicates a widespread lack of responsiveness of the public authorities that is redressed only when accountability mechanisms are activated. The role of the Commission was not considered to be proactive enough to counter the problems in the implementation of the law and it is perceived as accepting passively the excuses given by public authorities for failing to provide the information requested.

63. Freedom of association is guaranteed in article 20 of the Constitution and it is generally respected. Problems in respecting freedom of association affect trade unions in the private sector in companies with foreign capital, particularly in the textile industry.

64. The Government envisages amending the Law on Citizen Associations and Foundations adopted in 1998 to improve the conditions for the establishment and functioning of civil society organizations and to be in line with EU practices and regulations. In particular, amendments are aimed, on the one hand, at enabling associations to engage directly in economic activities, thus facilitating their ability to generate income for the delivery of their activities and the coverage of their expenses. On the other hand, the role of civil society organizations working on activities of public interest will be strengthened with the introduction of tax benefits.¹⁶

C. Government's attitude and policies

65. The Special Representative notes that there has not been much progress on consultation processes with civil society, which still take place on an ad hoc rather than systematic basis and mainly because of the efforts made by civil society organizations or because of the pressure of international organizations.

¹⁶ Government of the Republic of Macedonia, Strategy for Government Cooperation with the Civil Society Sector, 2007-2011, Skopje, January 2007, p. 27.

66. The Special Representative is encouraged by and welcomes the adoption of the Strategy for Government Cooperation with the Civil Society Sector for 2007-2011, which is meant to provide a framework to institutionalize cooperation between the Government and civil society. If implemented properly, the Strategy has the potential to redress the present situation of ad hoc, insufficient and in some cases non-existent consultation processes with civil society.

67. The Strategy outlines action in seven areas: (a) upgrading of the legal framework for the development of the civil sector; (b) participation of the civil sector in decision-making processes, which includes the participation of civil society organizations in drafting, implementing and monitoring public policies and national laws; (c) maintaining inter-institutional cooperation; (d) maintaining inter-sector cooperation; (e) involvement of the civil sector in the process of EU integration; (f) provision of more favourable conditions for the civil society sector; and (g) continuous development of the civil society sector.

68. The Unit for Cooperation with Non-governmental Organizations within the General Secretariat of the Government holds the primary role for coordinating, monitoring and reporting on the implementation of the Strategy. In the second year of implementation, an assessment of how the Strategy is being implemented will be conducted by means of a broad consultation process.

69. The Strategy concerns collaboration between Governmental authorities and the civil society sector and does not extend to local authorities. Measures to institutionalize collaboration between civil society organizations and all public authorities, in particular local authorities and the Parliament, are needed to overcome the present trend of ad hoc consultation processes.

70. As mentioned above, the Strategy was adopted to comply with the requirements of EU accession. While EU accession is definitely a priority for the Government, the human rights requirements that are to be met to achieve it are perceived more as part of the EU package than as a priority per se, for which there is political commitment. This might be an obstacle for the sustainability of human rights achievements, particularly when the attitude of the Government towards civil society organizations is not actively supportive. For instance, the Special Representative sees as an indication of such an attitude the lack of responsiveness or reaction of

the Government at information, reports, cases, complaints of human rights violations and abuses documented by defenders and brought to the attention of the concerned authorities, without a consequent action being taken by the Government to investigate, respond, or even refute the alleged facts.

D. The police

71. Compared to the assessment of 2003, some improvements can be registered in the role of the police: (a) the establishment of an internal complaint procedure in 2003; (b) a more ethnically diverse police force; (c) implementation of human rights training programmes for the police with the support of international donors; (d) the ongoing programme supported by OSCE on the establishment of community policing aimed at bringing the police closer to citizens; (e) an overall improved attitude towards citizens, with the exception of Roma who continue to be victims of abusive behaviour by the police.

72. Most of the abuses allegedly committed by the police relate to a police unit called “Alfi Unit”. The Alfi unit aims to counter urban crime and works in plain clothes. Access to their files is very limited and it is therefore difficult to investigate complaints of abuse committed by them. Even the Ombudsman does not have adequate powers or the instruments to fully investigate complaints against members of the Alfi unit.

73. The Internal Control and Professional Standards Department within the Ministry of Interior is the internal oversight mechanism to investigate complaints of abuse by the police. In his 2006 annual report, the Ombudsman reported that the Department “continued to conceal the relevant factual situation in some cases and to withhold information regarding the exceeding of the official authority and the excessive use of force requested by the Ombudsman. The Internal Control and Professional Standards Department during the reporting year continued to show unprofessional attitude towards the function of internal control mechanism”. He therefore recommended a “higher level of professionalism by the official in the area of human rights while performing police affairs and impartial and responsible work of the Internal Control Department”.¹⁷ The Special Representative takes note of the efforts made in this respect through

¹⁷ Republic of Macedonia Ombudsman, *Annual report 2006*, pp. 57 and 59.

the capacity building project funded by the European Agency for Reconstruction aimed at improving the functioning of this control mechanism.

74. The Special Representative is concerned that an external oversight mechanism to investigate abuses committed by the police does not exist. The problems of the internal mechanism outlined above make the absence of an external control mechanism an even more worrying concern. The Special Representative is encouraged by the ongoing initiative of OSCE, which is coordinating a working group composed of public authorities, civil society organizations, international organizations and the Ombudsman, with the aim of proposing a possible external control mechanism and paving the way to setting it up.

75. Another problem is that human rights defenders do not have access to detention centres and police stations. This is a serious obstacle that prevents defenders from fully performing their monitoring and protection role. The Government has assured the Special Representative that the OSCE initiative will alleviate the problem of access to police stations for defenders.

76. As regards police stations, the Minister of Interior referred to legal obstacles, namely the limitations provided for by the Law on Classified Information, which prevents the access of human rights defenders to police stations. Only the Ombudsman can access police stations.

77. As regards detention centres, which are under the responsibility of the Ministry of Justice, defenders stated that they are either denied access or have difficulty in getting permission to visit detention centres.

E. The judiciary

78. The Law on the Independent Court Budget was adopted in September 2003 and entered into force in January 2004. The law provides for the judiciary to prepare and execute its own budget. It has therefore improved the independence of the judiciary. However, representatives of the judiciary pointed to the need to further amend the law to improve the independence of the judiciary.

79. The lengthy duration of judicial procedures continues to be a major cause of inefficiency of the judiciary. However, the Special Representative appreciates the information provided by

the Government on the amendment of some laws on judicial proceedings. These amendments have shown some progress in reducing the duration of judicial proceedings between 2005 and 2006.

80. Another concern is the non-application to domestic jurisdiction of the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of the Council of Europe and of the decisions of the European Court of Human Rights.¹⁸

81. The Special Representative recalls that an independent judiciary open to human rights concerns and protective of the right to defend human rights is a determining factor in ensuring an enabling environment for defenders. For instance, rights like freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association, are important for the work of defenders. The Constitutional Court plays a fundamental role in interpreting these rights in a manner that is protective of human rights activities and of defenders exercising these rights in their work. An independent judiciary open to human rights also means a judiciary which proactively takes measures to facilitate the use of the judicial system by defenders for the protection and promotion of human rights.

F. The Ombudsman

82. The law strengthening the Office of the Ombudsman was adopted in 2003. The law strengthened the inspection functions of the Ombudsman. For instance, he or she can undertake unannounced visits to police stations. Despite improvements in the investigative functions of the Ombudsman, its mandate is not considered in compliance with the Paris Principles for national human rights institutions. Concerns regarding the limited scope of the mandate and its independence persist.

83. The cooperation of public authorities with the institution also continues to be a concern. “During 2006 a positive trend was noted in the cooperation with the Ombudsman, but the obstruction of its work from certain bodies of the State continued”, reported the Ombudsman.¹⁹ Some improvements were brought about by the introduction of reporting obligations established by the Government in 2005. All Governmental authorities are requested to submit quarterly

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 29.

¹⁹ Ibid. p.59.

reports on how they collaborate with and respond to the requests of the Ombudsman and justify failure to collaborate with his Office. The Ombudsman acknowledged some improvements in the responsiveness of Governmental authorities after the introduction of the quarterly reports. Nevertheless, he pointed to the poor quality of many responses and the need for improvement in this area.

84. The collaboration of the police with the Ombudsman also needs improvement. The Ministry of Interior issued circulars instructing the police to collaborate with the Ombudsman. This yielded results but more efforts are still needed to have a fully cooperative police force.

85. Another area that needs improvement is the awareness of local authorities of the role and functions of the Ombudsman. The six regional offices of the Ombudsman facilitate access to the institution at the local level but they need more visibility, including and especially among local authorities, to perform their functions effectively.

86. The Special Representative welcomes the support provided by international organizations, such as OSCE and OHCHR, to the Office of the Ombudsman, particularly in the area of capacity-building.

G. The international community

87. The international community continues to play a fundamental role in the country, both financially and in influencing policies and decision-making at the political level. As already mentioned, the EU has gained prominence, as membership is a high priority.

88. This influence has resulted in some positive measures in the short term. However, a commitment of State institutions to continue and sustain the improvement in the environment for the protection and promotion of human rights would be a more dependable guarantee.

89. The Special Representative welcomes the establishment of the Civil Society Advisory Board within the United Nations Country Team as a space for civil society to meet and interact with the United Nations in a regular and institutionalized manner. The Advisory Board is meant to provide a forum to discuss, propose and evaluate United Nations policies at the country level. The Special Representative suggests discussing possible actions to promote the implementation

of the Declaration on human rights defenders and to follow up the recommendations of this report.

IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

90. The Special Representative recognizes a considerable number of positive developments since her first visit. The most remarkable is the increased capacity and professionalism of human rights defenders, although human rights organizations still do not form a community in a position to protect defenders.

91. Another area of major progress has been in legislation, with the adoption of several laws relevant to the work of human rights defenders, including the law strengthening the inspection functions of the Ombudsperson; the law on free access to public information; the abolition of prison sentences for the offence of defamation; the law on an independent court budget, among others.

92. While progress can be registered on the adoption of new laws, the implementation of these laws is often not satisfactory. Enforcing and monitoring mechanisms that defenders can use to report cases of non-compliance and protect affected victims are still lacking, are insufficient or do not function properly. This has created an environment in which Government responsiveness is limited or absent.

93. The Special Representative recognizes that the international community has played an important role in strengthening human rights defenders in the country, both in funding their projects and in building their capacity. The lobbying and advocacy efforts of human rights defenders have often been more successful when backed by international organizations. The current trend of reducing funds for civil society organizations is a concern. The Special Representative firmly believes that support to civil society organizations by foreign donors is essential even if the Government's capacity to extend grants to NGOs is increased.

Recommendations for the consideration of the Government

94. **Institutionalize interaction and consultation processes with civil society in drafting legislation and policies, in reporting to international human rights mechanisms, and in other relevant areas of Government action. The Strategy for Government Cooperation with the Civil Society Sector can provide an appropriate framework for such cooperation provided its application is extended to local authorities and the Parliament.**

95. **Establish enforcement and monitoring mechanisms that defenders can use to report non-compliance with legislation and human rights abuses. Among those mechanisms, an external oversight mechanism to investigate abuses committed by the police should be established and the Commission in charge of monitoring the implementation of the law on access to information should be reinvigorated. Ensure that complaints on abuses committed by the Alfi Unit of the police can be independently investigated, including by the Ombudsman. Monitoring mechanisms should be established and accessible at the local level.**

96. **Remove the legal and administrative constraints that prevent human rights defenders from accessing detention centres and police stations and ensure that such access is given.**

97. **Ensure tax exemption for voluntary organizations and expedite the legal and procedural requirements for this purpose.**

98. **Take the appropriate measures to ensure that freedom of association of trade unions in the private sector is respected, so that activities for the promotion of labour rights are protected.**

Recommendations for the consideration of human rights defenders

99. **Develop and strengthen initiatives aimed at forming a human rights community able to voice the positions of human rights defenders more forcefully and act as a protection network for defenders.**

100. Improve strategies to work with the media to increase media understanding of and reporting on human rights and the work of defenders.

101. Consider the implementation and strengthening of measures aimed at improving the transparency and accountability of civil society organizations in order to build public confidence and to ensure that the human rights agenda remains relevant to the problems faced by the population.

102. Strengthen human rights work with a multi-ethnic dimension. This will contribute to overcoming deeply rooted discriminatory practices along ethnic lines and will strengthen the reconciliation process.

Recommendations to the international community

103. Accompany the transition process until the end and continue supporting human rights defenders, both in terms of funding and capacity-building. This should be done while respecting the independence of defenders in determining their priorities and strategies and preserving their role of monitoring State institutions.

104. In assessing the country's compliance with human rights requirements, such as those needed to access the EU, use indicators that go beyond superficial changes. For instance, in the case of legislation, it is not enough to just adopt laws more conducive to the work of human rights defenders, but also to demonstrate effective implementation.

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