

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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Serbia: Intimidation and threats against journalists must end

Amnesty International is deeply concerned by the increasing threats to freedom of expression in Serbia. The organization is calling on the Serbian authorities to undertake urgent efforts to ensure protection for all journalists who are subjected to intimidation and threats. The organization is also calling on the Serbian authorities to conduct a prompt, impartial and effective investigation to ensure that those responsible for such threats are brought to justice.

On 14 January, Belgrade based daily newspaper Kurir, received death threats against its owner and editor, Aleksandar Rodić. On the same day a separate threat to blow up its premises was also sent to Kurir. Police investigation into this case is ongoing.

In another such incident Dinko Gruhonjić, the president of the Independent Journalists' Association of Vojvodina (Nezavisno Drustvo Novinara Vojvodine- NDNV) has, on 9, 10 and 25 January received numerous intimidating messages, including death threats, posted on several social media sites including his own blog. These threats included posts like: "you deserve to be summarily executed", "you will be expelled to your country of origin" as well as many other intimidating and derogatory posts.

In addition, the constant campaign against Gruhonjić seems to be ethnically motivated and he is constantly referred to as: "*balija*" (derogatory term used to describe men of Muslim religious background), and "*ustaša*" (term used, mostly in derogatory context, to describe people belonging to Croatian nationalistic and political movement prominent during WWII). Gruhonjić is however of mixed ethnic background, and these terms are used in order to portray him as being anti-Serb rather than reflection of his real ethnic and/or religious background.

Prior to the latest incident, in 2007, Gruhonjić and his family, including his children, had already been subject of death threats by the subsequently banned neo-Nazi organisation in Serbia. At that time, Gruhonjić was granted police protection for two weeks.

Gruhonjić and NDNV reported the latest incident directly to Minister of Internal Affairs who is also a Prime Minister of Serbia, as well as to several other high-ranking Serbian government officials.

Gruhonjić however expressed his disappointment saying: "Although the threats issued now are almost the same as those in 2007 I have not yet received any official reply from the state authorities nor am I aware of ongoing investigation into these threats. Local and regional authorities however promised to help with this matter".

Amnesty International considers that intimidation and threats against journalists in Serbia constitute a threat to freedom of expression and the organization reminds the Serbian government of their international obligations to protect that freedom. Similar concerns have recently been voiced by both domestic and international organizations.

Public Document

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