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Serbia and Montenegro: Shameful investigation into sex-trafficking case

The government of Montenegro must re-open as a matter of priority a high-profile sex-trafficking case in which Montenegrin politicians, judges, police and civil servants are implicated, Amnesty International said in a letter to the Minister of the Interior of Montenegro. The Moldovan woman in the centre of the case alleges that Montenegrin politicians, judges, police and civil servants had tortured and raped her and other East European women who like her had been trafficked and held as sex-slaves.

"We are concerned that the government-appointed commission to investigate the actions of the police and judicial authorities in the case failed to adequately address the issues, giving rise to suspicions of an attempt to cover-up alleged official complicity in the trafficking of women and girls for forced prostitution in Montenegro," Irene Khan, Secretary General of Amnesty International said.

The Moldovan woman, known as S. C., is believed to have been trafficked into Montenegro and forcibly made to work as a prostitute in the period from 1999 to November 2002, when she found shelter in a Women's Safe House in the capital Podgorica. The 28-year-old mother of two, suffered horrendous physical and sexual abuse for over three years resulting in severe injuries including seven broken bones, internal injuries so that she could not sit down without pain, scars from handcuffs, cigarette burns on her genitals, and bruises in her mouth.

A criminal investigation was opened into the case and four people including Deputy State Prosecutor Zoran Piperovic were arrested on suspicion of being involved in trafficking women for the purposes of forced prostitution. In 2003, the case against the four suspects was dropped ostensibly for lack of evidence. Under international pressure, the Montenegrin government allowed for an inspection into the legality of the case. In November 2004, a government-appointed commission completed its investigation in the actions of the police and the judicial authorities in the case. The Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), which is monitoring the case, expressed its dissatisfaction with the commission's findings.

On its part, Amnesty International is seriously concerned that the Commission:
portrays S. C. as a criminal rather than as a victim of serious human rights violations;
makes derogatory references to her character;
gives rise once again to suspicions of an attempt to cover-up apparent official complicity in the trafficking of women and girls for forced prostitution.

"The Montenegrin authorities are duty bound by domestic and international law to bring the

perpetrators to justice and ensure that S. E. is offered the possibility for compensation for damage suffered. However, to Amnesty International's knowledge, nobody has been brought to justice for the trafficking for forced prostitution and torture of S. C., and she has not received any compensation," Irene Khan said.

Amnesty International considers that the Commission has failed to address the issues in an acceptable manner, and urges the Montenegrin authorities to re-open the case. Furthermore, the organization is seeking information as to whether there has been any disciplinary or criminal measures initiated against members of the Ministry of Internal Affairs for dereliction of duty in line with the Commissions findings.

Public Document

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