

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## PUBLIC STATEMENT

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### **Serbia: Guarantee the rights of Hungarians to protection from violence and discrimination**

Amnesty International welcomes the commitment by the Serbian Prime Minister and the authorities in Vojvodina, an autonomous province in Serbia, to guarantee the rights of the Hungarian minority population.

On 13 March Vojvodina Assembly President Istvan Pasztor met with Serbian Prime Minister Ivica Dačić, calling on the police to prevent further incidents of inter-ethnic violence in the province. They also agreed that perpetrators of attacks believed to be ethnically motivated in an impartial investigation should be moved through the penal system more rapidly, and agreed to continue co-operation for "a peaceful and secure life for all citizens of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, regardless of ethnicity or religious affiliation."

The meeting followed calls highlighting attacks, often believed to be ethnically motivated, on the Hungarian community. These previous attacks have left the Hungarian community feeling vulnerable and lacking protection.

In January for example, attacks in Temerin left two Hungarian men badly injured after being attacked by six Serbian men, and was reportedly believed to be ethnically motivated.

The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe has defined such "hate crimes" as criminal offences against persons or property, where the victim, premises or target of the offence are selected because of their connection to ... or membership of a group.

Amnesty International reminds the authorities that the Serbian constitution prohibits discrimination against minorities, and that Article 387 of the Serbian criminal code allows for the prosecution of violations which are motivated by race, "colour, nationality, ethnic origin or other personal characteristic", and criminalizes the promotion or instigation of racial discrimination.

In addition the Anti-Discrimination Law prohibits discrimination "be it overt or covert, on the grounds of race, skin colour, ancestors, citizenship, national affiliation or ethnic origin, language, religious or political beliefs, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, financial position, birth, genetic characteristics, health, disability, marital and family status, previous convictions, age, appearance, membership in political, trade union and other organisations and other real or presumed personal characteristics".

The rights of Hungarians in Serbia should also be protected under the Law on The Protection of the Rights and Freedoms of National Minorities.

Further, the organization notes that under their conditions of accession to the European Union, Serbia is required to ensure the promotion and protection of minority rights. However, as Amnesty International's research on discrimination in Serbia, including against Roma and LGBT people has shown, the authorities often fail to protect and respect the rights of minorities without discrimination.

While Amnesty International recognizes the seriousness of the human rights violations, including violations of the right to life, which have taken place in Vojvodina, the organization notes that there have also been a number of similar attacks on Serbs, allegedly by members of the Hungarian minority. In October 2012, for example, two Serbian men were attacked and injured in Temerin, allegedly by five members of the "Sixty-Four Counties Youth Organisation" (*Omladinskog pokreta 64 županije; Hatvannégy Vármegye Ifjúsági Mozgalom*).

The organization urges the authorities, and community leaders in both communities, as well as political parties in Hungary, including Fidesz (and its youth organization, Fidelitas), to refrain from inflammatory and discriminatory statements which can only exacerbate racial tensions, and fuel further attacks.

The organization also encourages Hungarians experiencing discrimination to present any allegations of discrimination to appropriate bodies, including the Office of the Ombudsperson in Vojvodina, and to the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination, based in Belgrade.

Public Document

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