

# URGENT ACTION

## PROTECT WOMEN'S DAY RALLY IN UZHGOROD

Vitalina Koval, a defender of women's and LGBTI rights, is organising a rally on International Women's Day, in the western Ukrainian city of Uzhgorod. Previous 8 March events in 2017 and 2018 were targeted by far-right groups and the authorities failed to protect participants. In 2018, Vitalina Koval and other demonstrators were attacked, paint was thrown at them and Vitalina sustained chemical burns to her eyes. A year on, the investigation is still ongoing and there are concerns that far-right groups might target the event again.

**TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER**

*Head of National Police in Zakarpattya Region, Roman Ihorevych Stefanyshyn*  
Ukraine

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Dear Colonel Stefanyshyn,

As you are undoubtedly aware, human rights defender **Vitalina Koval** is organising a rally on 8 March, International Women's Day, in Uzhgorod. In 2017 the far-right group "Karpatska Sich" disrupted the 8 March peaceful women's rights march, seizing and damaging participants' placards and verbally assaulting Vitalina Koval and other participants. In 2018, six members of that same far-right group doused Vitalina Koval and other participants with red paint, causing chemical burns to Vitalina Koval's eyes. The victims of the assault wrote complaints to the local police but no arrests have been made and the attack is still being investigated. In 2018, Vitalina Koval featured in Amnesty International's Write for Rights campaign, which garnered more than 380,000 actions in her support from around the world.

This year, activists from Ukraine and abroad are traveling to Uzhgorod to support the 8 March rally and show solidarity with the victims of the past attacks, despite concerns that far-right groups might once again target the peaceful action.

I call on you to take all necessary steps to guarantee that the participants can safely exercise their rights to peaceful assembly and freedom of expression, in particular:

- Provide necessary police protection, including by deploying a sufficient number of police officers with appropriate training and equipment at the event location; and
- Ensure sufficient patrol police presence in Uzhgorod before and also after the event to protect its organisers and participants from any pre-emptive and retaliatory violence and threats of violence.

Yours sincerely,

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

On 8 March 2018, Vitalina Koval was attacked for speaking up for her and others' rights at a rally she organised on International Women's Day in Uzhgorod, Western Ukraine. Six people from the violence-prone "Karpatska Sich" group doused participants with red paint, causing chemical burns to Vitalina Koval's eyes.

Vitalina, still covered in paint, went to the police station immediately after visiting the hospital. Her attackers had been detained and were seated in the reception area. The police officer requested that Vitalina state her home address – loudly – within earshot of her attackers, causing her to feel scared and unsafe. Vitalina during several hours insisted that her complaint be registered as a "hate crime" in the police database as at the outset the police did not wish to qualify the crime as such.

In the following days Vitalina and other activists who participated in the 8 March rally observed the rise of threatening speech by "Karpatska Sich"; in particular, the group via social media threatened Vitalina and other activists with further violence. On 12 March, two activists who participated in the 8 March rally but were not initially attacked reported that they had been followed to their homes and beaten up by members of "Karpatska Sich".

The investigation into the attack was inefficient and marred by delays, and those responsible have not been brought to justice. Vitalina Koval featured in the 2018 edition of Amnesty International's [Write for Rights](#) campaign alongside other prominent women human rights defenders from five continents. During Write for Rights, more than 380,000 actions were taken around the world expressing support for Vitalina Koval's work in defence of women's and LGBTI rights in Ukraine and calling for justice in connection with the violent attack she suffered in 2018.

**PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Ukrainian, Hungarian, Russian, English.**

You can also write in your own language.

**PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 8 March 2019**

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

**NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: Vitalina Koval (she/her), other peaceful participants in the 8 March rally (they/them).**