

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

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Impunity continues for war crimes and journalists and human rights defenders face harassment

Human Rights Council adopts Universal Periodic Review outcome on Serbia

Amnesty International is concerned that impunity persists in Serbia for crimes under international law, and the number of indictments raised by the Office of the War Crimes Prosecutor and prosecutions concluded at the Special War Crimes Chamber at Belgrade District Court remains seriously low.

The organization welcomes Serbia's acceptance of recommendations to strengthen the fight against impunity, including by cooperating fully with the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals and implementing the National Strategy for the Prosecution of War Crimes.¹ However, despite the long-delayed appointment of the War Crimes Prosecutor in May 2017, there has been no notable progress in issuing new indictments and there is still a significant backlog of pending cases. Amnesty International calls on Serbia to step up the prosecution of war crimes cases, including those involving senior level military and police officials, to put in place measures to enhance the protection and support of witnesses in war crimes trials, and to adopt legislation to adequately recognise and provide full reparation to individuals who have suffered harm as a result of crimes under international law, including the relatives of victims of enforced disappearance and victims of wartime sexual violence.

Amnesty International is deeply concerned about the shrinking space for human rights defenders. Organizations in Serbia continue to report relentless intimidation and physical and verbal attacks against human rights defenders, including misogynistic and discriminatory smear campaigns against women human rights defenders. NGOs working on transitional or post-conflict justice are particularly vulnerable to such threats.

Journalists also experience harassment, intimidation and physical assaults, yet prompt investigations and final convictions are rare.² Political television talk shows have been closed, editors dismissed,³ and websites of independent media hacked. The freedom of independent media remains severely curtailed.

Amnesty International welcomes Serbia's support of a more than 20 recommendations to guarantee freedom of expression and freedom of the press, to ensure protection of journalists and human rights defenders, and to thoroughly investigate all threats and attacks against them.⁴ Serbia must implement these recommendations without delay.

¹ A/HRC/38/14, recommendations 114.39-114.42 (Netherlands, Croatia, Sweden, Switzerland), 114.44-114.46 (USA, Belgium, Costa Rica).

² European Commission, Serbia Country Report, April 2018.

³ For example, Srđan Škoro, chief editor of the Belgrade daily *Večernje Novosti* (a third owned by the state), was dismissed in early 2014, reportedly for his criticism of the SNS.

⁴ A/HRC/38/14, recommendations 114.47 (Cote d'Ivoire), 114.56 (Italy), 114.58-59 (Netherlands, Norway), 114.61-114.64 (Republic of Korea, Germany, Belgium, Sweden, 114.66-114.71 (Brazil,

Background

The UN Human Rights Council adopted the outcome of the Universal Periodic Review of Serbia on 29 June 2018 during its 38th session. Prior to the adoption of the report of the review Amnesty International delivered this oral statement.

Amnesty International also contributed to the information basis of the review through its submission on country: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur70/6953/2017/en/>

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