

EXTERNAL

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Fear for Safety

22 July 1996

CROATIA Ivan Z _i_ ak

other human rights defenders

Amnesty International fears for the safety of Ivan Z _i_ ak and other human rights defenders in Croatia. At 12.35am on 18 July, a bomb was detonated 20 metres from Ivan Z _i_ ak's summer house in Sumartin on the island of Bra_. Amnesty International believes that Ivan Z _i_ ak was targeted because of his human rights activities.

Those critical of the Croatian Government's human rights performance are commonly perceived as traitors by the Croatian mainstream population. When violent acts are committed against human rights defenders, the perpetrators are rarely identified. When they are, it can be several years before they are brought to trial.

Ivan Z _i_ ak is president of the Croatian Helsinki Committee for Human Rights (HHO), a prominent Croatian non-governmental organization which is openly critical of the Croatian Government's human rights record. The state-controlled daily newspaper *Vjesnik* recently published an article accusing Ivan Z _i_ ak of having been an agent of the Yugoslav security services since the 1960s. He has denied the allegation and has announced a private prosecution against the *Vjesnik*.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

This incident is one of many reported to Amnesty International in recent years of the harassment of human rights defenders in Croatia. Those responsible for such attacks are rarely brought to justice. Amnesty International is concerned that in such an atmosphere of impunity, this type of attack is likely to recur.

Slobodan Budak, a lawyer who has represented many victims of human rights violations and is a former president of the HHO, was physically assaulted by two men on 30 April 1996 while dining in a hotel in Zagreb. He required medical attention for his injuries. In 1994, his house in Karlobag was vandalized.

Although a police officer was found to be responsible for the vandalism and charges have been filed against him, by April 1996 the case had not yet come to court.

Explosives have been used to intimidate human rights defenders in the past, although previously the attacks have been against lawyers representing the victims of human rights violations. On 17 March 1995, a bomb was thrown into the office of attorney Branka Skansi-Ratkovi_ in Dubrovnik. Two other lawyers involved in human rights work, Mirko Francheski and Ivan O_i_, had bombs placed in their offices in Split in 1993. Some lawyers have stopped taking on controversial cases because of such attacks.

Other human rights defenders in Croatia have reported telephone threats, interference with their correspondence, and vandalism of their private property. The authorities' usual response is that they do not have the resources to prevent such incidents.

There have been reports of physical threats and attacks on independent journalists, such as Goran Flauder (see EXTRA 126/95, EUR 64/11/95, 27 October 1995) and Edita Vlahovi_, as well as administrative measures being used against them such as discriminatory taxation. Croatian legislation allows for the imprisonment of journalists and editors found guilty of slandering or insulting the president. Amnesty International is concerned that this could result in people being prosecuted solely for exercising their right to the free expression of political or other beliefs without resorting to or advocating the use of violence. Charges under this legislation have been filed against the editor of the *Feral Tribune* and another journalist on its staff.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express/airmail letters in English, German, Italian, French or your own language:

- urging a prompt investigation into the bomb attack on Ivan Z _i_ak's house and calling for those responsible to be brought to justice;
- urging a prompt investigation into other physical attacks and acts of harassment aimed at other human rights defenders;
- expressing concern that lawyers, independent journalists and others appear to have been the targets of attack because of their human rights stance or for the peaceful expression of their opinion;
- calling for the authorities to take steps to end the impunity with which these intimidatory acts are committed.

APPEALS TO:

President of the Republic of Croatia

Dr Franjo Tudjman
 Predsjednik Republike Hrvatske
 Pantov_ak 241
 10000 Zagreb, Croatia
Fax: +385 1 4565 256
E-mail: ured@predsjednik.hr
Telegrams: President Tudjman, Zagreb, Croatia
Salutation: Dear President

Minister of Justice

Miroslav Šeparovi_
 Ministar
 Ministarstvo za pravosudje i op_u upravu Republike Hrvatske
 Savska cesta 41
 10000 Zagreb, Croatia
Fax: +385 1 536 321 / 615 104 / 536 500
Telegrams: Ministar za pravosudje i op_u upravu, Zagreb, Croatia
Salutation: Dear Minister

Minister of Internal Affairs

Mr Ivan Jarnjak
 Ministar
 Ministarstvo za unutrašnje poslove Republike Hrvatske
 Savska cesta 39
 10000 Zagreb, Croatia
Fax: +385 1 443 715
Telegrams: Ministar za unutrašnje poslove, Zagreb, Croatia
Salutation: Dear Minister

COPIES TO: diplomatic representatives of Croatia accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 2 September 1996.