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## **Serbia: Human rights defenders under threat**

Human rights defenders are under attack in Serbia and the authorities are failing to protect them, Amnesty International said in a briefing published today.

“Physical attacks and threats to the lives and property of human rights activists are seldom promptly and impartially investigated by the authorities,” said Sian Jones, Amnesty International’s Balkans expert. “Few perpetrators are brought to justice”.

“The lack of political will on the part of the authorities to fulfil their obligations to guarantee human rights defenders their right to freedom of expression and assembly creates a climate of impunity which stifles civil society.”

In the briefing, [\*Serbia: Human rights defenders at risk\*](#), Amnesty International reviews the latest attacks against them, including against leading women human rights activists.

“Over the past year women human rights defenders have been attacked in the media including being threatened with lynching. Such attacks are made by parliamentarians, members of ultra-right organizations and members of the security services indicted for war crimes. Other defenders have had their property destroyed, their offices attacked or been beaten by members of neo-Nazi groups,” Sian Jones said.

These defenders include Nataša Kandić, director of the Humanitarian Law Centre, Sonja Biserko of the Serbian Helsinki Committee for Human Rights, and Biljana Kovačević-Vučo of the Lawyers’ Committee for Human Rights (YUCOM) as well as the women’s NGO Women in Black. They have been portrayed in the media as anti-Serb for favouring the independence of Kosovo, and for demanding accountability for war crimes committed in the 1990s in Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo.

The briefing also focuses on those who defend the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people (LGBT). Since 2001 the LGBT community in Serbia has been unable to hold a Pride Day parade due to serious threats by right-wing and religious organizations. Such organizations have already made unveiled threats against the organizers of this year’s parade, scheduled for 20 September.

“The LGBT community is marginalized even within civil society and criminal investigations into assaults on LGBT people, even where the perpetrators have been identified, are rarely resolved,” Sian Jones said.

“The Serbian authorities are obliged to protect the rights of all people to peaceful assembly and freedom of expression. They must condemn publicly all attacks on and threats to human rights activists, and provide protection and support during the forthcoming Belgrade Pride later this week.”

Amnesty International calls on the Serbian government to implement in law and in practice the principles of the UN Declaration of Human Rights Defenders, which provides a framework for the protection and support of human rights defenders. The organization also calls on the embassies of EU member states to provide protection and support to defenders in Serbia.