

Mr. Bujar Nishani, Minister of Justice
Mr. Lulzim Basha, Minister of Interior Affairs
Mr. Spiro Ksera, Minister of Labor, Social Affairs
and Equal Opportunities

Stockholm February 9, 2010

Dear Minister Bujar Nishani, Minister Lulzim Basha and Minister Spiro Ksera,

Civil Rights Defenders (former Swedish Helsinki Committee) express its deepest concern about the threats against and intimidation of human rights defenders in Vlora. The concern relates to human rights defenders fighting for women's rights and who are connected to the work of the shelter "Vatra". For the last twelve years the shelter "Vatra" in Vlora has provided protection and support to victims of trafficking and enforced prostitution, as well as victims of domestic violence.

The recent events started with a report by the program "Fiks Fare" on Top Channel related to the case of a victim of extreme domestic violence. Unfortunately, the "Fiks Fare" report made public the location of Vatra's shelter, thus endangering the safety of the victims who are sheltered there and of Vatra's staff. As a consequence, "Vatra" was forced to transfer the victim, as they could no longer ensure her safety. Moreover, Vatra's legal advisor, who was also serving as a defense lawyer in the case, as well as two of Vatra's social workers have resigned. They all confirmed that they were threatened by the perpetrator in this domestic violence case.

Failure to react to threats and/or attacks on human rights defenders create an hostile atmosphere in which those who persistently fight for equal rights for all citizens can be attacked without consequences. Unobstructed work of human rights defenders and organizations is a basic precondition for any democratic society. The failure to protect this right in a proper way is in clear breach of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, to which Albania is a state party.

We respectfully request that you exercise all your authority and use all mechanisms available to adequately protect the victim of domestic violence and the human rights defenders in this case as well as other human rights defenders in the country. This should include investigating and prosecuting those who attack and intimidate human rights defenders and offer unequivocal support to those who work to protect human rights.

Yours sincerely,

Marie Månson
Programme Director