

Prishtina, 17 December 2012

Civil Rights Defenders reactions on recent incidents and attacks

Civil Rights Defenders urges the Government of Kosovo and relevant institutions to take the necessary measures to bring to justice the everyone responsible for the recent attacks, threats, hate speech and crimes by religious extremist and radical groups specifically targeting Kosovo 2.0 and Libertas, Civil Rights Defenders partners, in line with their international and domestic obligations in protection and fulfillment of human rights.

We also call on State Prosecutor and Kosovo Police to act accordingly and to promptly investigate and bring to justice perpetrators of the hate crime attacks, physical assaults and life threats on these two organizations and other individuals.

We urge them to take measures against organizations that act against the values and liberties enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo. Their acts are not only aimed at these two organizations in question, but are also a threat to the rights and liberties of every citizen of Kosovo, such as the right to life, right to speech and freedom of expression.

We strongly support every person's right to exercise the freedom of religion. The use of violence cannot be justified in the name of religion, as we are well aware that religions promote peace and coexistence in society.

On Thursday December 13th, after Kosovo 2.0 announced in media the release of their magazine Kosovo 2.0, a magazine that explores sexuality and gender, including LGBT rights. The event agenda included the screening of two films and interviews with prominent civil society representatives, a discussion with magazine contributors, and a party. Following the announcement, Kosovo 2.0 started receiving hateful and threatening messages and comments on their Facebook page and personal Facebook profiles of Kosovo 2.0 staff. At the same time some of the online media, after publishing the news, allowed the publication of hateful and denigrating comments targeting Kosovo 2.0 and other individuals who were scheduled to speak at the event. Next day Kosovo 2.0 reported these comments and messages to the Kosovo Police and officially requested their presence at the venue throughout the day. Kosovo 2.0 had police assigned for protection, but around 6pm (Friday, 14 December 2012), a group of approximately 20 men rushed into the venue. The police failed to react in a timely manner. As a result, the same group destroyed Kosovo 2.0 stage, causing serious damages and physically assaulting one of the staff members of Kosovo 2.0. You can watch the footage of demolition here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VGglSdKxZaU> Kosovo 2.0 did not succumb to these threats and held the reading session with a small delay, in defense of the right to speech and the right to association.

After the incident, Special Police forces were called to the venue. At around 10.30pm, half an hour before the launch party, a growing group of over 100 protesters to begin to approach the building, yelling epithets such as "Out pederasts!" and "Allahu akber!". Despite police presence, Kosovo 2.0 decided to cancel the event due to safety concerns for their staff and guests in the building. Participants and guests had to be evacuated by the Special Police force in small groups so as not to provoke the crowd. Civil Rights Defenders field staff was among these guests and personally witnessed



these events.

From Friday until today, individuals and organizations that gave interviews, or were scheduled to speak at the event have been threatened through Internet messages, SMS and phone calls. Kosovo Police has been presented with the full evidence of these threats.

Violence and attacks unfortunately persisted throughout the weekend. On Sunday evening, December 16, 2012, a group of 7 people attacked the premises of Libertas, an organization that works with promotion and protection of LGBT rights in Kosovo. At that moment there were 17 people present, members of LGBT community and their supporters, discussing the incidents at the promotion of the newest issue of Kosovo 2.0 magazine. Around 9pm, two people from the group left the premises and were confronted by the attackers at the entrance of the building. One managed to return to the office to warn the others; meanwhile, the other was severely beaten by 3 or 4 men. The attackers also threw tear gas through an open window in the office, clearly aiming to force the people inside to leave the premise. Kosovo Police was notified and arrived immediately at the scene of the crime, but were not able to arrest any of the offenders. Charges have been filed against unknown persons.

This violent discourse which has inhabited our public domain through these assaults, and the online world via life threats, hateful comments, calls for violence and hate crimes, be it on various Facebook pages, pictures or Youtube videos, needs to be stopped. It is not enough to condemn such a worrisome and disturbing occurrence, a threat to the freedom of speech and civil rights is a threat to democracy. Concrete measures are not necessary only to bring to justice to the perpetrators of these actions, but they should also be a message of what this society stands for, which is protection of civil liberties and equal rights for all.

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