

STATEMENT of the Human Rights Committee  
Civil Resistance Movement  
Belgrade Circle

In a one-year period, about 20,000 Croats have emigrated from Vojvodina, mostly from settlements in which they had formed a majority or a significant minority. They have emigrated owing to pressure and violence directly organised and carried out by the Serbian Radical Party and a group of refugees from Western Slavonia gathered around that party. The fact that this party has gained a reputation and a large number of members among the Serb exiles from Croatia, by promising to move them into Croatian houses as a reward for participating in the fight for the Serbian state, is alarming. Of particular concern is the government's failure to respond to this party's apparent practice of using refugees for acts of violence against Croats, Hungarians, "pseudo-Serbs" and those refugees who do not support "ethnic cleansing" as compensation for war damage.

The latest case in Hrtkovci indicates that the targets are precisely those Serbs who have spoken publicly against the expulsion of non-Serbs.

On 18 September, a group of refugees, supporters of the arrested Ostoja Sibinčić, stormed the store of Aleksa Ejić, the president of the SPO and one of the locals most engaged in the protection of human rights. They took his keys and threw him out. The police came to the aggrieved Ejić's place on the basis of the group's report that he kept bombs in his house. During the search of the house, his weapon, for which he had a proper permit, was confiscated, and when they took him to the police station to take a statement, they left a guard which prevented a child entering the house and informing a lawyer.

Other Serbs are also being exposed to daily harassment only because they are against the use of force and against dividing people into those who deserve to live in Serbia and those who need to be displaced. Especially those Serbs who, as representatives of the village, have addressed the federal authorities concerning the protection of people exposed to attack only because they are Croats or Hungarians. As a result, certain teachers are being threatened with being fired, and refugees with being sent back to where they came from.

Yesterday, 20 September, journalists from New York's 'Village Voice' were witnesses when a man broke into Juliana Molnar's house, threatening her because she was talking to journalists. He demanded that they leave the village immediately. Not wanting to get into an argument, they left and, on their way out, they found policemen in front of the house talking to a group of refugees. They had let the troublemaker through without any questions, and the journalists were taken to the police station to register their arrival in Hrtkovci. On that occasion, they insisted that the journalists talk to the refugees they had chosen for them.

This case and others like it seriously jeopardise the statements of government officials that the "state of law" will function within everyday life and that the government will protect the personal and property security of all citizens, without any unfavourable discrimination based on origin, belief, religion, or other similar standards.

For the Human Rights Committee

Nataša Kandić



