

PRESS BRIEFING

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After Novi Sad: Crackdowns and Human Rights Violations in Serbia

PANEL BIOGRAPHIES

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BACKGROUND

It has been 18 months since the Novi Sad railway station canopy collapse and subsequent and massive protests across Serbia.

Protests which the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights categorised as “people demanding equality and denouncing corruption”. What began as a spontaneous call for justice and accountability for the loss of life has matured into what many Serbia civil society activists refer to as a broader social movement. It’s been characterized as a social movement to challenge democratic rollbacks, corruption, and attempts to criminalise civic activism.

Today, human rights defenders (HRDs) and other activists in Serbia face increasing threats ranging from smear campaigns that expose personal information to direct threats and surveillance. Civil society organisations are targeted by the Serbian authorities as well as media outlets aligned with them.

In the year since the protests began and threats against HRDs and organisations expanded, the authorities have introduced a number of pieces of legislation to restrict fundamental freedoms and human rights and which threaten judicial and prosecutorial independence. Indeed, this is a playbook employed across the broader region.

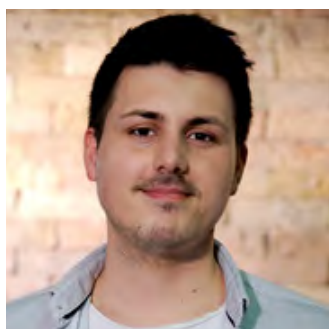
This press briefing will provide more information on the situation in Serbia, with insights from representatives from two prominent Serbian civil society organisations.



Jovana Spremo

Advocacy Director, Lawyers' Committee for Human Rights (YUCOM)

Jovana Spremo is the Advocacy Director at the Lawyers' Committee for Human Rights (YUCOM). YUCOM is a Serbian NGO founded in 1997, dedicated to promoting the rule of law, protecting human rights, and providing free legal aid. Based in Belgrade, YUCOM engages in judicial reform, trial monitoring, and advocacy, particularly concerning freedom of expression, assembly, and environmental justice. Jovana's expertise is in the rule of law, with a special focus on the EU negotiation process, covering topics related to judiciary, protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as transitional justice and reconciliation. She holds a BA in International Relations from the Faculty of Political Science of the University of Belgrade, MA in the interdisciplinary programme of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights Law and LLM in European Integration at the Law Faculty of the University of Belgrade. She is the coordinator of the Working Group for Chapter 23 of the National Convention on European Union.



Uroš Jovanović

Public Policy Program Manager, Civic Initiatives

Uroš Jovanović leads the Public Policy Program at Civic Initiatives. Civic Initiatives (Građanske inicijative) is a Serbian NGO established in 1996 to strengthen civil society, promote democracy, and protect human rights through advocacy, education, and active citizen participation. Operating in a challenging environment with restricted civic space, the organization focuses on monitoring, policy analysis, and supporting grassroots activism. At Civic Initiatives, Uroš focuses on monitoring the fundamental conditions required for an enabling environment for civil society development. He oversees processes related to documenting human rights violations, producing and publishing reports, engaging with decision-makers, and coordinating advocacy campaigns aimed at policy reform. The program currently prioritizes monitoring state repression against protesters and providing them with necessary support.

ABOUT HUMAN RIGHTS HOUSE FOUNDATION AND THE NETWORK OF HUMAN RIGHTS HOUSES

Human Rights House Foundation (HRHF) envisions a world in which everyone can freely and safely promote and enjoy all human rights.

HRHF recognises that lasting human rights change can be achieved when a strong and independent civil society is united in solidarity and able to freely contribute to the promotion and protection of human rights at home and abroad. Human Rights Houses are central to HRHF's work empowering civil society and advancing its vision.

HRHF is an international non-governmental organisation that establishes and supports Human Rights Houses – coalitions of local independent civil society organisations working to advance human rights at home and abroad. Today 85+ CSOs are united in the Network of Human Rights Houses, active across Eastern and Western Europe, the Balkans and the Caucasus.

In close partnership with the Network of Human Rights Houses, HRHF advocates at international and intergovernmental level to advance and protect fundamental rights that underpin independent civil society and make it possible to hold institutions and individuals accountable. HRHF advocates for inclusion and active participation of civil society, reports on human rights trends, and works to strengthen international human rights mechanisms and standards in order to influence the situation at the national level.

HRHF holds consultative status at the United Nations, participatory status at the Council of Europe, and is a Strategic Framework Partner of the European Union's Eastern Partnership civil society initiative.

The Network of Human Rights Houses has a well-developed national and regional protection infrastructure and works to support human rights defenders at risk.

HRHF was established in 1992 and is headquartered in Oslo with an office in Geneva and representation in Brussels.