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## INFORMATION ON CONSULTATIVE MEETING HELD ON 13 APRIL 2023

Representatives of the Institution of Human Rights Ombudsman of Bosnia and Herzegovina held the first of the consultative meetings with civil society organisations in Bosnia and Herzegovina on 13 April 2023. The meeting was held at the Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina in Sarajevo, starting at noon.

In the upcoming period, meetings have been planned to take place in Mostar and Banja Luka on 5 May 2023 and in mid-May, respectively.

The topic of the meeting was the respective roles and positions of IHROBiH and civil society organisations in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Potential and sustainable concepts for providing mutual support and exchanging experiences between the meeting participants were discussed. Positive aspects reflected in everyday cooperation were reviewed, both through protection and through lobbying approach.

The gaps and challenges highlighted by civil society are that civil society organisations are guided by short-term projects and are not sufficiently visible in the public.

It was concluded at the meeting that IHROBiH has good cooperation with civil society organisations but that this cooperation should be encouraged and enhanced by their joint efforts. IHROBiH is not sufficiently visible in the public space, and there should be joint actions to promote and protect human rights in Bosnia and Herzegovina through greater cooperation with civil society organisations, the media and through raising public awareness, thereby boosting visibility, recognisability and importance of IHROBiH.

**LIST OF CSO REPRESENTATIVES ATTENDING IHROBiH AND CSO MEETING HELD ON 13 APRIL 2023**

1. Sarajevo Canton Association of the Blind: Fikret Zuko and Safeta Baković,
2. Trust “Infohouse“: Zafir Šišić and Belmina Čorbić,
3. Trust “Girls” (Cure): Selma Hadžihalilović,
4. Citizen Association Information Centre for Persons with Disabilities “Lotus“ (Lotos): Sandra Marković and Suvad Zahirović,
5. Istočno Sarajevo City Organisation of the Blind and Visually Impaired: Nevenka Ašonja and Jovica Mijatović,
6. RS Citizen Association “Stop mobbing“: Anica Ramić,
7. CRS - Catholic Relief Services: Dajana Bogdanović,
8. Caritas Bosnia and Herzegovina: Siniša Sajević,
9. Union for Sustainable Return and Integration in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Bisera Džidić,
10. Women’s Rights Centre: Aida Ćosić,
11. CCI – Civil Initiative Centres: Hasan Kamenjaković,
12. ADI – Association for Democratic Initiatives: Snježana Ivandić - Ninković,
13. Association “Network for Building Peace“ (Mreža za izgradnju mira): Maida Zagorac,
14. Birn – Balkan Investigative Reporting Network of Bosnia and Herzegovina: Semir Mujkić,
15. FBiH Alliance of Organisations for the Support of Persons with Intellectual Disabilities “Sumero“: Haris Haverić,
16. CIN – Centre for Investigative Reporting: Leila Bičakčić,
17. Association “Your Rights BiH“ (Vaša prava BiH): Mirza Begić and Edina Šabić,
18. Association “Medica“: Amra Beganović,
19. Proni – Centre for Youth Development: Jasmin Jašarević,
20. Institute for Youth Development Kult: Refik Čavčić,
21. Association “My Right“: Binasa Goralija,
22. Association “Living with Down’s Syndrome“ (Život sa Down sindromom): Seveda Kujović,
23. Association “Forgotten Children of War” (Zaboravljena djeca rata): Mirna Omerčaušević,
24. Nahla – Centre for Education and Research: Sehija Dedović.



Date: 20 April 2023

**MINUTES**  
of IHROBiH and CSO meeting held on 13 April 2023

Representatives of the Institution of Human Rights Ombudsman of Bosnia and Herzegovina held a meeting with civil society organisations in Bosnia and Herzegovina on 13 April 2023. The meeting was held at the Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina in Sarajevo, starting at noon.

The meeting was attended by:

- Ombudspersons of BiH: Nevenko Vranješ, PhD, Jasminka Džumhur, PhD, and Nives Jukić; assistant ombudspersons of BiH: Irma Hadžiavić, Alma Suljić, Antea Jozić, Emina Halilović, Predrag Raosavljević.
- Office of the Agent of the BiH CoM before the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg: Harisa Bačvić.
- EU Delegation: Alessandro De Giacomo.
- Council of Europe: Beti Čolak i Maja Lukić-Schade.
- UN Resident Coordinator Office in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Peđa Đurasović.
- Embassy of the Kingdom of Sweden to BiH: Nedim Bukvić.
- List of CSO representatives attending enclosed with these Minutes.

Agenda:

1. IHROBiH role and position in protection and promotion of human rights
  - CSO perspective
  - IHROBiH perspective
2. CSO role and position
  - IHROBiH perspective
  - CSO perspective
3. Possible directions of future cooperation from CSO perspective;

The ombudspersons of BiH opened the meeting and in their introductory address highlighted the following:

Ombudswoman Nives Jukić pointed to the promotional and protective roles of IHROBiH and explained both in detail.

Ombudsman Nevenko Vranješ pointed to the issues of the poorly reformed judiciary in BiH and citizens' lack of understanding of human rights, as well as to the fact that most citizens do not even know what IHROBiH is and what its role is.

Ombudswoman Jasminka Džumhur pointed out that IHROBiH is a natural partner for CSOs and that strengthening the partnership with CSOs is extremely important. In addition, she expressed concern for the state of persons with disabilities, the judiciary, police efficiency, and cited

strengthening the ministries of labour and social policy, ministries of justice, ministries of health and other ministries as the ultimate IHROBiH goal.

The presentations by agenda items followed the ombudspersons' introductory address.

## **I IHROBiH role and position in protection and promotion of human rights**

### **a) CSO perspective**

Mr Jovica Mijatović addressed the gathering on behalf of **Istočno Sarajevo City Organisation of the Blind and Visually Impaired** and pointed out that IHROBiH represented hope for members of the said association and conducted its work pursuant to its mandate and to the extent to which it is allowed, and that may achieve major progress by working jointly. He also pointed out that under law persons with war-related disabilities have greater rights than person with congenital disabilities.

In his presentation, Mr Fikret Zuko addressed the gathering on behalf of **Sarajevo Canton Association of the Blind**, highlighting how he would like for society in BiH to appreciate IHROBiH more and comply with its recommendations, and how we should all work together on raising the awareness about the IHROBiH and CSO roles. He highlights the fight for inclusion of persons with disabilities as the greatest goal, and states the fact that the concept of disability is governed by parents as a problem for this group, given that most often in such situations it is about interest.

Ms Tifa Tučić addressed the gathering on behalf of **Tuzla Association of Citizens of Impaired Vision** and stated that she had addressed IHROBiH in person and that her experience was very positive. She thinks that citizens of BiH do not utilise IHROBiH sufficiently.

Mr Haris Haverić addressed the gathering on behalf of **FBiH Alliance of Organisations for the Support of Persons with Intellectual Disabilities “Sumero”**, expressing gratitude to assistant ombudspersons as he had addressed them on several occasions and they had always been available. He also stressed that given the IHROBiH limitations in terms of taking certain decisions, IHROBiH was always available when dealing with key decisions and issues.

On behalf of **Association “Network for Building Peace”** Ms Maida Zagorac pointed to how IHROBiH was extremely important to all those dealing with human rights protection issues. She stated that it is our duty as citizens to address IHROBiH if we believe that some of our rights are at risk, since this very institution is the one where we can expect support and advice. She believes that, given IHROBiH importance, its promotional role must be made much clearer, while its protective role is at an enviable level.

Ms Sevda Kujović, President of **Association “Living with Down Syndrome”** addressed the gathering, noting that IHROBiH had supported many cases her association had sent to it, and that in most of those cases it was about amendments to the FBiH Act on Parent Carers and that they had had excellent cooperation in that respect. She expressed a wish to cooperate in the future, too, and the desire for her association to take part in the initial stage of abolishing the concept of legal capacity.

Ms Selma Hadžihalilović addressed the gathering on behalf of **Trust “GIRLS”**, pointing out that in the future they should work on developing standards for vulnerable persons. She also thinks that IHROBiH has the key role with regard to that. She expressed gratitude to Ombudswoman Jasminka Džumhur and assistant ombudspersons for the previous excellent cooperation with their association, and she said she was looking forward to future cooperation.

## **b) IHROBiH perspective**

Following the CSO addresses, the Ombudspersons of BiH expressed their opinions about IHROBiH.

Ombudswoman Jasminka Džumhur pointed to the following:

- Well established electronic case management system, enabling permanent monitoring of the state of human rights based on complaints;
- Very young and professional staff;
- Broadly established mandate that is not backed by adequate resources:
  - Inadequate space for the ombudspersons and the entire team in all offices;
  - Insufficient visibility for which we need media support;
  - Mandates cumulated in one institution opens the issue of internal organisation;
- Lack of recognition for IHROBiH importance for the development of society on democratic principles;
  - Inadequate relations between the competent bodies and IHROBiH, due to the lack of sanctions;
- Inadequately regulated status of IHROBiH staff members, they are not civil servants and under the Salary Act they are not recognised as a separate category;
- Inability to organise staff-tailored trainings.

In the continuation of her presentation, Ombudswoman Jasminka Džumhur pointed to the issue of trust of citizens and pointed out that IHROBiH got a lot of praise but also a lot of criticism from complainants, which primarily referred to case closure decisions. This is because, under the law, IHROBiH has no competence to act on cases where courts have already issued decisions as it cannot review the merits of cases or address disputes between natural persons. There are a number of objections concerning the contentiousness of IHROBiH actions, which is largely the consequence of insufficient human resources.

Assistant Ombudswoman/Head of Department for Monitoring the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Irma Hadživdić, stressed that IHROBiH sent comments in the process of adoption of the FBiH Parent Carer Act and that following its adoption there was an influx of complaints concerning the problems to which IHROBiH had already pointed in their comments.

## **II CSO role and position**

### **a) IHROBiH perspective**

Ombudswoman Jasminka Džumhur discussed the IHROBiH perspective on civil society organisations. She said that the latter and national human rights institutions were natural partners in the protection and promotion of human rights, that IHROBiH is the communication channel between the authorities and citizens, and that the CSO position in BiH depends to a great extent on the organisation, its mandate and programme objectives. There are more and more obstacles to its actions and they are becoming more and more conspicuous. The same goes for the weaknesses of the civil society itself. She listed the following as the obstacles:

- It is unclear whether it is about a great level of misunderstanding about the role of civil society or about deliberate intention to ignore and downplay its importance;
- Lack of understanding for the importance of innate freedoms and for the fact they can be limited under strict circumstances;
- Constraints on support, including financial support, especially when it comes to local NGOs, thematically closely directed to protecting certain rights or rights of certain categories;

- More and more conspicuous attacks against CSO representatives, especially in the year marking the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of UDHR.

Ombudswoman Jasminka Džumhur stated the following as weaknesses of civil society:

- Limited project-oriented action, greatly depending on donor funds available;
- Short-term projects for local NGOs, with systemic problems present;
- Internal organisation;
- Visibility;
- Given that NGOs apply for funds with the same donors, there is competition that affects their mutual relations.

Ombudswoman Jasminka Džumhur further reflected on the civil society perspective of IHROBiH and thus stated the following:

- Strategic and partnership cooperation is rarely developed;
- Frequently inviting IHROBiH to join activities organised by NGOs immediately before events are organised and dense schedule of activities in May/June and December is another problem;
- Asking for letters of support to apply for projects with donors, where cooperation with IHROBiH is a requirement;
- Stating IHROBiH as a project service beneficiary, without informing IHROBiH about it.

## **b) CSO perspective**

A discussion between CSO members followed, stating:

Ms Anica Ramić stated on behalf of **Association “Stop Mobbing”** that the association she comes from has 5000 registered members. She said that Association “Stop Mobbing” has had excellent cooperation with IHROBiH for years. What she particularly stressed is that the fact that people do not understand the term ‘mobbing’ is a major problem. She stated that the data that her association received 236 mobbing-related reports last year only is particularly worrying and that lately more and more reports refer to sexual harassment. She thinks that as a CSO they are not sufficiently visible in the media and therefore expressed concern that none of their projects have been successful and in their future work wished to talk with IHROBiH about how the next project could be successfully implemented, which is this association’s major goal at the moment.

Mr Suvad Zahiragić stated on behalf of **Association “Lotus”** that NGOs unfortunately depend on the support from international organisations. He also stated that citizens’ attitude to the values they wish to reach has changed considerably, as well as that more and more NGOs are founded as they see the possibility to reach the resources. What he pointed out inadequate resources as an issue that NGOs are faced with and he thinks that NGOs are not loud enough and should impose themselves and point to the significance of their actions and request for the resources to be directed to their actions.

## **III Possible directions of future cooperation from CSO perspective**

Finally, Mr Jovica Mijatović proposed on behalf of **Istočno Sarajevo City Organisation of the Blind and Visually Impaired** certain lines of action concerning the cooperation between IHROBiH and CSOs. These are giving an overview by region, monitoring progress by region, organising meetings in the future at which IHROBiH and CSOs will discuss the same topics as at this meeting and jointly draft a plan of future actions.

The ombudspersons of BiH gave closing remarks.

Ombudswoman Nives Jukić said she agreed with the participants who stated that IHROBiH was not visible enough in terms of its promotional and protective roles but she thinks that the key is in the media and this should be worked on in the future. However, she thinks that IHROBiH has excellent cooperation in terms of its protective role and thus invites all those attending to address IHROBiH. She also stated that she agreed with Ms Selma Hadžihalilović that the standards for persons with disabilities were to be set and that this, too, should be worked on soon. She concluded her presentation by saying that everything could be the source of discrimination but that the key social issue is ignorance.

Ombudsman Nevenko Vranješ said that all discussions from this meeting would be reviewed in the coming period. He suggested the CSO participants to list multiple organisations within their membership with a view to cooperating with IHROBiH more successfully and more efficiently.

Ombudswoman Jasminka Džumhur invited the CSO participants to organise meetings that IHROBiH would gladly respond to and to review the Platform for the Cooperation with Non-Governmental Organisations and the criteria on the IHROBiH website for better cooperation in the future.

Ultimately, the conclusion is that IHROBiH has excellent cooperation with CSOs but that this cooperation should be further encouraged, enhanced and made more visible by joint efforts. IHROBiH should hold such meetings with CSOs more often. IHROBiH is not sufficiently visible in the public space and it should work on the promotion and protection of human rights in BiH through even greater cooperation with CSOs, the media and through raising public awareness, thereby enhancing visibility, recognisability and importance of IHROBiH in society.

Minutes by:  
Sara Zjakić

