



On the Attack against the Chair of the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee Krassimir Kanev

Statement of the Civic Solidarity Platform members

31 October 2016

We, members of the Civic Solidarity Platform¹, strongly condemn a violent attack in Sofia against Krassimir Kanev, one of the most prominent human right defenders in Europe and the chair of the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee (BHC). BHC is the largest human rights organisation in Bulgaria and a member of our network. We express our solidarity with Krassimir and members of Bulgarian human rights community.

Mr. Kanev was attacked by two unknown men in downtown Sofia in the morning on 27 October 2016. He was hit in the face and stomach. His attackers did not say a word and immediately fled the scene after the incident. Police were called to the site after the attack. Mr. Kanev sustained minor injuries.

Members of BHC have been repeatedly harassed and threatened in the past because of their human rights work. However, the attack on Krassimir Kanev is the first case of direct physical violence.

The work of the BHC is well known at the international level and is highly respected. Among its many activities, BHC is actively involved in the protection of minority rights and takes a public position in this respect. Increasingly, xenophobic and homophobic expressions and views are spread in the public media and statements by politicians and public figures in Bulgaria. Speech inciting hatred or violence against minorities has been allowed, approved and even praised in this country. Aggression is directed towards both members of minorities and NGOs who stand in support of their rights.

The inability and/or unwillingness of the Bulgarian authorities to take a clear and uncompromising regarding manifestations of intolerance, hate speech and hate-motivated violence and effectively investigate hate crimes has created an atmosphere of impunity where a violent attack against a prominent human rights defender has become possible.

We, as human rights NGOs working across Europe, Asia and North America and as members of the Civic Solidarity Platform, call upon the Bulgarian authorities to take immediate action to identify the perpetrators of the attack against Krassimir Kanev and its masterminds. They must use all necessary means for a swift and effective investigation of the crime in order to bring the culprits to justice.

We also urge the government of Bulgaria to implement its international obligations by taking all necessary steps to protect human rights defenders in the country, especially those working to defend the rights of minority members, and refrain from negative rhetoric regarding human rights and those working to defend them.

¹ Civic Solidarity Platform is a network of more than 80 human rights NGOs from Europe, Asia and North America. For more information, please see <http://civicsolidarity.org>.

Signed by the following members of the Civic Solidarity Platform:

Albanian Helsinki Committee
Analytical Center for Interethnic Cooperation and Consultations (Georgia)
Article 19 (UK)
Association of Ukrainian Human Rights Monitors on Law Enforcement
Barys Zvozkau Belarusian Human Rights House (Lithuania)
Belarusian Association of Journalists
Belarusian Helsinki Committee
Center for Civil Liberties (Ukraine)
Center for the Development of Democracy and Human Rights (Russia)
Committee against Torture (Russia)
Crude Accountability (USA)
Freedom Files (Russia)
German-Russian Exchange (Berlin, Germany)
Helsinki Association of Armenia
Helsinki Citizens Assembly – Vanadzor (Armenia)
Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia
Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights (Poland)
Human Rights Information Center (Ukraine)
Human Rights Monitoring Institute (Lithuania)
Human Rights Movement “Bir Duino-Kyrgyzstan”
Helsinki Committee of Armenia
Human Rights Center of Azerbaijan
Humanrights.ch (Switzerland)
HURIDDOCS (Switzerland)
Institute "Respublica" (Ukraine)
International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims (Belgium)
International Partnership for Human Rights (Belgium)
International Youth Human Rights Movement
Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law
Kharkiv Regional Foundation “Public Alternative” (Ukraine)
Kosova Rehabilitation Centre for Torture Victims
Legal Transformation Center (Belarus)
Moscow Helsinki Group (Russia)
Netherlands Helsinki Committee
Norwegian Helsinki Committee
Nota Bene (Tajikistan)
Office of Civil Freedoms (Tajikistan)
SOVA Center for Information and Analysis (Russia)
Promo LEX Association (Moldova)
“Protection of Rights without Borders” (Armenia)
Public Association “Dignity” (Kazakhstan)
Public Foundation “Golos Svobody” (Kyrgyzstan)
Public Verdict Foundation (Russia)
Regional Center for Strategic Studies (Georgia/Azerbaijan)
Swiss Helsinki Committee
Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union
UNITED for Intercultural Action – European network against nationalism, racism, fascism and in support of migrants, refugees and minorities
World Organisation against Torture (OMCT)
ZARA – Zivilcourage und Anti-Rassismus-Arbeit (Austria)
Anki Wetterhall, Swedish OSCE Network (in personal capacity)
Melissa Hooper, Human Rights First, USA (in personal capacity)