



**Universal Periodic Review
Pre-session of Croatia
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Statement of the Human Rights House Zagreb

Hello,

I am Ivan Novosel and I am speaking on behalf of the Human Rights House Zagreb that together with ten CSOs prepared a joint NGO submission to Croatia's third UPR. I am grateful to briefly address some of the human rights challenges in Croatia within this framework.

Regarding international obligations, Croatia failed to submit **periodic reports** to the treaty bodies regularly and on time, and it **failed to ratify** the Convention on Enforced Disappearances and the European Social Charter (revised) for ten years. The **implementation of the last UPR Recommendations** was not approached, and neither organised systematically nor in a genuine cooperation with human rights civil society.

Systemic respect and promotion of human rights is hindered by **multiannual absence of key public policies** in areas of human rights, gender equality and civic space. Croatia's **referendum legislation** does not prohibit holding referendums on human rights which opens a possibility for misuse of this democratic instrument to encroach upon the human rights of minorities and vulnerable groups. Regarding the institutional framework, the independence of the **Children's Ombudsperson** is hindered by the possibility of the Parliament to dismiss the Ombudsperson by not accepting its annual report on children's rights.

Regarding the freedom of expression, along with a pressing issue of **misusing legal actions to pressure the media**, journalists in Croatia are exposed to **threats and assaults**. At the end of 2018, there were more than a thousand lawsuits for causing offense, libel and public defamation against 90 Croatian media organizations and their journalists. **Hate speech** remains a significant problem, especially targeting minority groups like Roma, Serbs and LGBTIQ persons.



With the respect to **hate crime**, the police, prosecutors and judiciary face difficulties in identifying it and appropriately applying the law. The bias motivation is not clearly classified and hate crime is often inadequately prosecuted as a misdemeanor.

Organizations and **human rights defenders** working on the protection of **refugees** are subjected to the attempts to criminalize their work through groundlessly linking them to people-smuggling and other criminal offenses. Private investors use SLAPP against **environmental rights defenders and their organisations**. Additionally, the short-term format of public funding for projects negatively affects the work of human rights organizations engaged in **long-term advocacy and watchdog activities**.

Regarding **COVID-19 crisis**, the system of human rights limitations currently in place is not entirely in line with international standards, notably with Siracusa Principles. The emergency measures limiting human rights do not have incorporated a sunset clause (regulating duration of the limitation), and are not subject to parliamentary oversight.

Vulnerable groups are the most affected by the **COVID-19**. Currently, at the highest risk are elderly persons residing in care homes, and hospitalised children due to restrictions of movement and access to healthcare and social care institutions.

Thank you.