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ADVOCATES LAUNCH CAMPAIGN TO PROTECT WOMEN HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN SERBIA

June 21, 2007, Belgrade, Serbia: Advocates in Serbia have launched a major campaign to pressure the Serbian government and international community to better protect Serbian women who defend human rights.

The campaign was endorsed at a recent conference of peace groups in Vojvodina, Serbia, which met to review months of pressure and intimidation against women's civil society by nationalists in Serbia.

The meeting released a declaration calling on the Serbian government, the United Nations (UN) and other nongovernmental organizations to step up their efforts on behalf of women defenders.

The declaration urges Ms Hina Jilani, the UN's Special Representative on defenders, to make women a focus of her work and calls on the office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to monitor the outcome.

The campaign is being coordinated by three leading Serbian advocates – the Women in Black Network from Serbia, the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights (Belgrade) and the Anti-Trafficking Center, also in Belgrade. Fourteen other human rights organizations signed on.

According to a conference statement, those most threatened include critics of Serbia's discredited past regimes and women who defend the rights of sexual minorities.

The statement also singles out the media as a source of intimidation, and adds that women are also under pressure from Serbia's "patriarchal culture."

While most of the pressure on defenders comes from the hostile environment in Serbia, the conference also warned that the efforts of advocates are undermined by "insufficient organization and coordination, conceptual disagreement...and rivalry within the nongovernmental sector."

Contacted by The Advocacy Project, Rachel Long from Women in Black said that civil society had been highly responsive to the declaration. One of the goals, she said, is to encourage cooperation among peace groups.

The Advocacy Project has recruited Peace Fellow [Gail Morgado](#) (Georgetown University) to work in Belgrade with Women in Black this summer.

- Visit the [Women in Black Network from Serbia](#)