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SERBIAN PRESS SEEKS JAIL FOR WOMEN PEACE ACTIVISTS WHO ADVOCATE INDEPENDENCE FOR KOSOVO

February 21, 2007, Belgrade and Prishtina: In a blatant attempt to intimidate advocates of a peaceful solution to the Serbia-Kosovo conflict, a leading Serbian nationalist newspaper has called for the prosecution of the Women's Peace Coalition, a joint initiative of women activists, for advocating for the independence of Kosovo.

A leading article last Sunday in the tabloid paper *Kurir*, titled simply "Prison," argued that the Serbian Constitution proscribes up to 15 years in jail for anyone calling for the break-up of Serbia. The paper urged the prosecutor's office to open proceedings against the Serbian organization, The Women in Black Network, one of the two partners in the Coalition.

A statement yesterday from the Coalition accused the paper of intimidation and stated that the *Kurir* journalist was likely "acting on instructions from those power centers, which want to further destabilize the Balkans and further alienate Serbia (from Europe)."

The [Kosova Women's Network \(KWN\)](#) and the [Women in Black Network \(Serbia\)](#) launched the Women's Peace Coalition in March 2006 to monitor the joint Serbia-Kosovo negotiations on Kosovo's future status from the perspective of women and to reject the "divisions of ethnicity and religion, as well as state borders and barriers."

The Coalition has been active on both sides of the troubled frontier since Martti Ahtisaari, the UN's Special Representative on Kosovo, proposed that Kosovo be awarded limited independence, under continued international supervision.

A recent statement from The Women in Black Network insisted that the political future of Serbia and Kosovo must rest on human rights rather than nationalism, even if this results in Kosovo's independence. The Coalition followed this up with an open letter last week that called for Kosovar women to be included in talks on the future status of Kosovo and in the drafting of any new constitution for Kosovo.

Both partners in the Peace Coalition understand that their position will be unpopular with nationalist sentiment on both sides of the frontier. Public opinion in Kosovo has been strongly in favor of outright independence for Kosovo, and on February 10 two ethnic Albanians died after being shot with rubber bullets by UN police during a major protest against Mr. Ahtisaari's plan.

On the other side, in Serbia, the *Kurir* article appears to indicate that Serbian nationalists will use the right-wing press to go after anyone who speaks out in favor of political moderation, and of rights rather than extremism.

* For more information, and to express solidarity with the Coalition email [KWN](#) or [Women in Black](#).

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