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Serbia and Montenegro: High profile sex trafficking case collapses - suspicion of a cover-up

Amnesty International is concerned that victims of forced trafficking are being failed by the judicial system in Montenegro. Recently a high profile trial collapsed after the Prosecutor's Office in Podgorica, the capital of Montenegro, halted criminal proceedings against the Montenegrin deputy state prosecutor and three other men for involvement in sex-slavery.

The main witness, a 28-year-old mother of two from Moldova, suffered horrendous sexual abuse for over three years resulting in severe injuries including seven broken bones, internal injuries so that she cannot sit down without pain, scars from handcuffs, cigarette burns on her genitals, and bruises in her mouth. She alleged that Montenegrin politicians, judges, police and civil servants had tortured and raped her and other East European women who like her had been trafficked and held as sex-slaves.

"The halt in criminal proceedings has led to allegations of a cover-up by the Montenegrin authorities," said Amnesty International. "The trafficking of women and girls as sex slaves is a major concern and the collapse of this case despite apparent detailed evidence and testimony can only cast doubt on the Montenegrin authorities' commitment to fight this inhuman trade."

"Her story is consistent with many other horrifying tales of women and girls forced into sexual slavery," said the organization. "She had come to Serbia from Moldova looking for work. After handing over her passport she became a slave, sold on to different 'owners' as if she was an animal, routinely beaten, drugged, burned and raped."

Whenever she tried to escape she alleges that she was handed back to her 'owners' by the police until she finally managed to escape to the Women's Safe House in Podgorica in November 2002.

"We are deeply concerned at allegations of official complicity in the abuse of women and girls forced into slavery, and we call on the Montenegrin authorities to seriously and urgently address this issue," Amnesty International said.

Background

There has been a marked growth of the trafficking of women and girls for forced sexual services throughout the world. Montenegro and the Balkans generally are known to be both transit countries as well as destinations used by traffickers of women and girls. Most of the victims come from Eastern Europe - in the Balkans it is estimated that some 60 per cent of trafficked women and girls come from Moldova, one of Europe's poorest countries. Many victims are lured by promises of work in Western Europe as

waitresses or similar but are forced into sexual slavery and many are broken mentally and physically by rape and extreme brutality. The victims are frequently repeatedly sold and moved to different locations.

Public Document

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