

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Public Statement

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Croatia: Rights of children must be respected

Amnesty International today called on the Croatian authorities to immediately implement the recommendations of the United Nations (UN) Committee on the Rights of the Child (Committee) which were issued on 1 October 2004, after the Committee considered Croatia's second periodic report on measures to give effect to the rights enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).

Prior to the examination of Croatia's report, Amnesty International had submitted a written briefing to the Committee. The document Croatia: Briefing to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, published today, details Amnesty International's concerns with regard to issues related to the implementation of the CRC in Croatia. Amnesty International's concerns focus in particular on:

- the failure of the authorities to prevent serious violence and bullying among children and young adults placed in social care institutions and to fully address the needs and problems of institutionalized children;
- the failure of the authorities to fully integrate Romani children in the Croatian school system.

Amnesty International urged the Croatian authorities to implement the Committee's recommendations, as outlined in the concluding observations. The Committee expressed its deep concern at cases of violence between children and young adults placed in homes for re-education and other institutions and about cases of violence and bullying between children and young adults in social care institutions. Moreover, the Committee was concerned about reports of incidents of violence in detention centres and at the fact that *"persons below 18 in detention or custody are placed with those up to the age of 27 years"*.

The Committee recommended that the authorities *"take all necessary measures to prevent acts of violence in homes for re-education and social care institutions"* and urged the authorities to increase the protection of children in social care institutions, inter alia, by ensuring that violent acts are reported and investigated, and providing adequate support and treatment, including psychological treatment, to victims of such violence. Moreover, the Committee recommended that the Croatian authorities fully implement international juvenile justice standards. In particular, the Committee recommended that the deprivation of liberty is used only as a measure of last resort, for the shortest possible time, that guarantees of due process are fully respected, and that persons under the age of 18 are not detained with adults. The Committee also recommended that the authorities establish special detention centres for person below the age of 18 and improve the conditions of detention for children.

Moreover, the Committee expressed concern at the de facto discrimination against ethnic and

national minorities, Romani and foreign children, and at incidents of harassment and hatred that have a negative effect on the development of children. The Committee expressed concern about the different access to education of children belonging to minorities and vulnerable groups, including Romani children, which *"hampers the full enjoyment of a system of education adequate to their values and identity"*.

The Committee recommended that the authorities *"carefully and regularly evaluate existing disparities in the enjoyment by children of their rights and undertake on the basis of that evaluation the necessary steps to prevent and combat discriminatory disparities"* and that Croatia *"strengthen its administrative and judicial measures to prevent and eliminate de facto discrimination against children belonging to minorities especially Roma and foreign children"*. Moreover, the Committee recommended that the Croatian authorities ensure the *"implementation of the National Programme for Roma, providing it with adequate human and financial resources and with periodic evaluation of its progress"*.

To see the document, *Croatia: Briefing to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child* please go to:

<http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engneur640032004>

Best,