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## Statement on the Republic of Croatia's Universal Periodic Review

### 16<sup>th</sup> session of the United Nations Human Rights Council

**Address by Sanja Sarnavka**

**President of B.a.B.e., Be Active. Be Emancipated  
Chairperson of the Human Rights House Croatia**

Thank you, Mr. President / Madam Vice-President,

As the only civil society representative present from Croatia, I have the extremely difficult task of highlighting in a two minute speech all major problems related to human rights violations in Croatia. And I have to admit, that all twenty minutes would not suffice.

To my regret, I have to state that the situation regarding human rights protection in Croatia has significantly deteriorated since the submission of our report for the NGO compilation.

Protests have been carried out in the last month, first and foremost due to the fact that **many people suffer from the inaction of the government to improve the economic situation.** They are deprived of one of the fundamental human rights – the right to work and to just and favorable working conditions. Already in 2001, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights was concerned about the scale of unemployment. What would they say today, when according to the Economy Watch, Croatia has the second highest rate of unemployment in the world? People are protesting as they do not want to listen to empty promises by the government, which are never to be fulfilled.

In such circumstances, **I find it hard to understand that the government rejected recommendations related to the Free Legal Aid Act.** We do not mind government

insisting on the financial census, but we do mind extremely bureaucratic and complicated procedures for obtaining free legal aid. Albeit the external and internal evaluations that demonstrate poor implementation results, the government is not willing to amend this law and remove all obstacles to effective implementation. It is almost impossible for a Roma person or anyone with a low level of education to fill out the requested forms and become an applicant. Not to mention the hindrance put to them by the amount of documents needed, the ridiculous amount of compensation for lawyers, and the almost complete exclusion of civil society organizations as legal aid providers.

As far as **minority rights** are concerned, we have to stress eleven pending cases (some pending for more than eleven years now!) of repossession of property and unsolicited investments! All NGOs and ombudsman efforts did not motivate government to finalize them in appropriate and non-discriminatory manner.

Next points to mention are the **freedom of expression and independence of the media, which have been significantly reduced**. True incorrupt journalists either lost their jobs or are marginalized both in private and public media. In the process of passing the Public Television and Radio Act almost no amendments and recommendations by civil society and professional associations were accepted, as well as candidates for the Programme Council and the Steering Committee -- **public television turned into State television**. Moreover the government and acting director of the Croatian HRT signed a so-called temporary (for a two year period!) contract in complete secrecy. Without public debate in the public sphere, one can agree, democracy dies!

These are just highlights of a few problems -- no time to discuss the rights of people with disabilities, the right to freedom of assembly, access to information, *et cetera*. The most recent interim report (March 2011) of the Commission of the Council and the European Parliament states correctly: **Croatia should redouble its efforts** to meet all closing benchmarks in the EU's opening negotiation position for Chapter 23, which is field to judiciary and fundamental rights.

I would say to conclude -- Croatia is lost in translation, translation from the best intentions and *de jure* provisions into *de facto* implementation and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Thank you!

*The Human Rights House Croatia was the coordinator of the joint civil society submission to the UPR of Croatia (referred as to "JS1").*