



NEWSLETTER

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ALBANIAN HELSINKI COMMITTEE

NEWSLETTER

July-September 2007

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Monitoring the election process

In the context of the parliamentary by-election in constituency no. 31 in Tirana, the Albanian Helsinki Committee engaged 15 accredited and trained observers to monitor the electoral process. The constituency had 31 polling stations, including special institutions such as: the penitentiary institution at "Mine Peza" street, the pre-trial detention institution at "Jordan Misja" street, and the "Queen Geraldine" maternity hospital. Part of the monitoring was to observe the vote counting center at the respective ZEC.

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AHC assesses human resources management at Albanian penitentiary institutions¹

During July 24-25, the Albanian Helsinki Committee organized an assessment mission on human resources management at Albanian penitentiary institutions. The main goal of this activity was to improve the human resources situation, including procedures for selecting new personnel, as well as their training.

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AHC convenes Egyptian organizations to a working meeting

In order to mobilize and build capacities of Egyptian community organizations so they can produce better lobbying in their demands for recognition and respect for their rights, on September 25, the Albanian Helsinki Committee organized a working meeting with the organizations of this community. The meeting was facilitated by Partners-Albania. One of the main objectives of the meeting was to offer knowledge and information about the steps toward identification of an issue and how to address it through a successful advocacy and lobbying campaign.

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1. RESPECT FOR CITIZENS' RIGHTS

1.1 Monitoring missions

1.1.1 Greater attention to respect for emigrants' rights

With a view to better respect for the rights of Albanian emigrants and returned individuals, during the period July – September 2007, AHC monitored the border crossing points of Kakavijë, Kapshticë, Qafthanë, and Tushemisht. AHC representatives held direct meetings with senior police officers at the regional level, border police staff of the monitored border crossing points, and observed from up close the infrastructure of premises for receiving readmitted individuals and other surrounding facilities. The monitoring groups also met with Albanian emigrants detained for illegal border crossing.

It resulted from the monitoring that, in spite of efforts, the treatment of Albanian emigrants still presents problems and leaves to be desired. AHC has raised all observed issues with the responsible state entities and offered concrete recommendations for improving respect for the rights of Albanian emigrants and repatriated individuals going through the Kakavijë border crossing.

1.1.2 Monitoring the election process

In the context of the parliamentary by-election in constituency no. 31 in Tirana, the Albanian Helsinki Committee engaged 15 accredited and trained observers to monitor the electoral process. The constituency had 31 polling stations, including special institutions such as: the penitentiary institution on the “Mine Peza” street, the pre-trial detention institution on the “Jordan Misja” street, as well as the “Queen Geraldine” maternity hospital. The group also monitored the vote counting center at the respective ZEC.

Based on its monitoring of these elections, AHC prepared and publicized the monitoring report on the pre-election process, the polling day, and the vote count. For further information about the monitoring results, you may read AHC's report, publicized in English and Albanian, on our website: www.ahc.org.al.

2. ADVOCACY AND LOBBYING TO PROTECT HUMAN RIGHTS

2.1 Offering expertise in the area of legislation and its implementation

The Albanian Helsinki Committee offers expertise to the Ministry of Justice and the General Directory of Prisons regarding criteria for selection of new prisons' personnel.

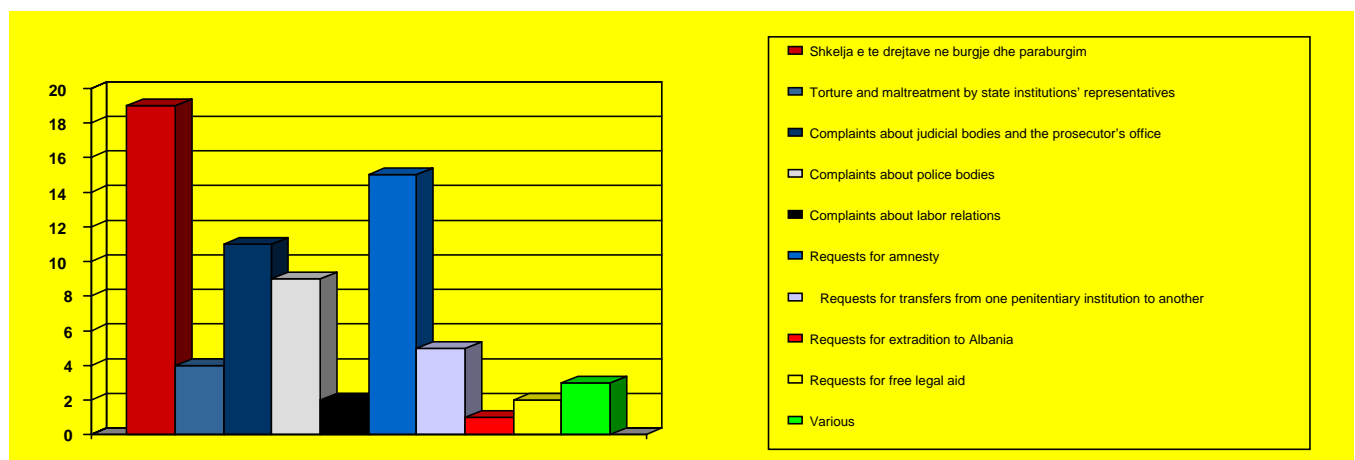
In the context of offering expertise in the penitentiary area, AHC and its experts offered their views regarding ministerial order no. 4756, dated 1.8.2007, by the Minister of Justice regarding the hiring and training of personnel at the penitentiary institutions of Fushë-Krujë and Korçë. At the same time, AHC experts became acquainted with a plan

of measures of the General Directory of Prisons regarding procedures for the opening of these penitentiary institutions and the 2-week preliminary training program for personnel in uniform that will be selected for these institutions.

AHC suggested the organization of a special event aiming at procedures for selecting personnel of the penitentiary institutions, described in the Minister’s order, so that these procedures will be in accordance with international standards applicable to other penitentiary systems.

2.2 Legal counseling, addressing complaints, and interventions with state institutions¹

During the period July – September 2007, AHC received 72 complaints and requests for free legal aid. Most of the complaints came from arrested and convicted persons. The complaints related to violations of rights at the judicial system, the police, and prisons. For part of the complaints, AHC conducted verifications, offered legal counseling, or addressed concerns with responsible state institutions, such as: the Ministry of Justice, judicial bodies and prosecutor’s offices, the High Council of Justice, the Ministry of Interior, the General Directory of Prisons, the State Police Directory, etc. AHC also offered assistance with fulfilling citizens’ documentation for the courts. During this period, the number of responses and reactions by state institutions toward concerns raised by AHC has grown.



3. CAPACITY BUILDING AND TRAINING ACTIVITIES

3.1 Albanian local trainers train the prison administration

During September 10-12, 2007, AHC carried out a mission to oversee and evaluate 8 local prison trainers from three local penitentiary institutions: IEDP in Lezhë, IEDP in Vaqarr and IEDP on ‘Jordan Misja’ street in Tiranë. They had been trained by AHC in June of this year about the treatment of juveniles and women in penitentiary institutions.

¹ Addressing letters and complaints is done in the context of the legal clinic, supported financially by the Swedish Helsinki Committee

During the three days of the monitoring mission, AHC representatives monitored the implementation of the training program module for the treatment of juveniles and at the Lezhë and Vaqarr institutions, as well as the training program module for the treatment of women at the penitentiary institution for imprisonment sentences on the 'Jordan Misja' street in Tiranë.

Issues addressed during the training program included: psychological consequences of imprisonment in juveniles and women; conflict management, day programs, a safe environment at a penitentiary institution, basic skills for motivating interviews, and best practices of activities and programs at penitentiary institutions for juveniles and women. Trainers used different methodologies based on the first version of the training manual. The following participated to support the continuing mission: Mr. Jan van den Brand, an expert from the Dutch Prison Service; Ms. Edlira Papavangjeli, project director at AHC; Mr. Mirgen Lata, director of legal and social affairs at the General Directory of Prisons, and Mr. Filip Llakaj, responsible officer for training sectors at the directory.

Based on the assessment of each presentation, the international expert offered recommendations for improving their didactic skills, the training programs, and the selection of training participants.

3.2 AHC assesses human resources management at Albanian penitentiary institutions²

During July 24-25, 2007, AHC organized an assessment mission on the management of human resources at Albanian penitentiary institutions. AHC sought to offer its assistance for improving human resources management, new personnel selection procedures, and their training.

To that end, AHC held meetings and discussed about the existing experience and needs with Mr. Eduard Halimi, Deputy Minister of Justice, Mr. Saimir Shehri, Director of the General Directory of Prisons, representatives of the human resources directory, the training sector, the directory of legal and social affairs, the directory of prison police at the Police Directory, and senior leadership staff of penitentiary institutions for imprisonment sentences on the 'Jordan Misja' and 'Mine Peza' streets in Tiranë, the Vaqarr IEDP, and representatives of the Prison Hospital Center in Tiranë. Mr. Jan van den Brand and Mr. Jacques van Huet, Dutch experts from the Dutch Agency of Correction Institutions, as well as Program Manager Ms. Edlira Papavangjeli, were engaged in this assessment mission.

The mission will be followed by a workshop on human resources policies to be organized in October 2007.

3.3 Supportive mission for restructuring the prison training center

² This activity is part of the program 'Humane Leadership of Prisons', supported financially by the European Delegation in Tiranë, in the context of the CARDS 2004 programs.

During September 13-14, 2007, AHC organized a mission to support the General Directory of Prisons, particularly the training sector, in order to transform it into a training center for Albanian prisons. The goal was to make the center well-structured in order for it to function according to required standards.

For this mission, the General Directory of Prisons set up a working group, consisting of staff members of the training sector, as well as other employees with experience in training and drafting didactic programs. Together with Albanian and foreign experts built the necessary foundations for the further development of this center.

AHC engaged two international experts of penitentiary issues, Mr. Jan van den Brand and Mr. Warnder Speelman. Program Manager Ms. Edlira Papavangjeli facilitated the mission.

3.4 AHC trains its activists on the conduct of the opinion poll on the public and self-esteem of the staff of Tiranë, Elbasan, Fier, and Gjirokastër municipalities³

In order to increase the participation of minorities in local government bodies and to improve the services of the latter for groups in most need, as well as to increase the capacities of municipal councils to draft effective strategies for boosting access of minorities and groups in need, AHC and the municipal councils of the Tiranë, Elbasan, Fier, and Gjirokastër municipalities will survey the views of citizens in these municipalities and will conduct an assessment of self-esteem of the municipal administration. On September 15, 2007, AHC organized the training of interviewers regarding the survey methodology.

3.5 AHC convenes Egyptian organizations to a working meeting⁴

AHC convenes Egyptian organizations to a working meeting

In order to increase capacities of Egyptian community organizations so they can lobby for the rights of this community, on September 25, the Albanian Helsinki Committee organized a working meeting with representatives of the organizations of the Egyptian community. During the meeting, participants received assistance about the steps they need to undertake in order to identify the primary problems of the community they represent that need to be raised with the authorities, as well as about how they can work together to protect and demand respect for their rights. During the meeting, participants managed to identify three primary problems, the actors, and collaborators that organizations can work with for drafting strategies to address and resolve those problems.

In cooperation with the Egyptian organizations and community representatives, AHC will undertake a series of necessary steps for raising the identified issues with competent state

³ This activity was realized in the context of the project “Increasing the role of the civil society and state institutions in the promotion and better respect for minority rights,” funded by CORDAID.

⁴ This activity was realized in the context of the project “Increasing the role of the civil society and state institutions in the promotion and better respect for minority rights,” funded by CORDAID.

authorities and local and international organizations. The association Partners-Albania facilitated the meeting.

4. RAISING HUMAN RIGHTS PROBLEMS WITH STATE INSTITUTIONS

4.1 Meetings with state authorities

Meeting with representatives of the Interior Ministry's Office of Citizenship and Refugees

On September 4, 2007, Ms. Vasilika Hysi, AHC Executive Director, held a meeting with Ms. Drita Avdyli, Director at the Directory of Citizenship and Refugees, in order to discuss problems and difficulties in the integration of asylum-seekers and steps undertaken by responsible entities to ensure respect for their rights. At the meeting, interlocutors exchanged opinions about respect for asylum-seekers' rights and their integration into the Albanian society as well as about possibilities existing in the Albanian civil society to cooperate in this area. AHC representatives highlighted some obligations that the Albanian state should fulfill and the possibilities for their fulfillment. An observation was conducted at the refugees' center after the meeting.

Meeting with senior officials of the Directory of Borders and Emigration

On September 27, 2007, Ms. Vasilika Hysi, Executive Director, and Ms. Ersida Sefa, Project Coordinator, conducted a working meeting with senior officials of the Directory of Borders and Emigration. The purpose of the meeting was to present AHC's activity regarding respect for the rights of emigrants and returned persons, as well as to identify opportunities for cooperation with the Directory of Borders and Emigration in this area.

AHC begins cooperation with municipal councils in the districts of Fier, Elbasan, and Gjirokastër to increase minorities' access to local governance

In the context of increasing minorities' participation in decision-making and their access to local government bodies, during the period July-September 2007, Project Coordinator Ms. Klesta Alikaj and AHC Legal Advisor Mr. Niazi Jaho met with representatives of local government bodies of the municipalities of Tiranë, Fier, Elbasan, and Gjirokastër. Beside outlining AHC objectives in the area of monitoring minority rights and minority access to local government bodies, AHC signed cooperation agreements with municipal councils and is in the process of surveying the public's assessment and self-esteem of the local administration with regard to respect for minority rights at the local level.

AHC values the importance of cooperation with the relevant municipalities and the support that municipal councils have provided to this initiative.

5. RAISING PUBLIC AWARENESS THROUGH THE MEDIA

5.1 PUBLIC REACTIONS BY AHC

During the period July-September 2007, AHC was sensitive to developments in the society and reacted publicly through press statements regarding happenings such as: the undertaking of penalizing fiscal measures toward Top Channel television, the electricity crisis, the draft law “On the compensation of the communist regime’s politically persecuted persons.” It also issued notifications and press statements regarding the parliamentary by-election held in constituency 31 in Tiranë and AHC’s involvement in them. For further information, go to: <http://ahc.org.al/kshh/DEKLARATA.html>

5.2 SENSITIZING TV PROGRAMS ABOUT MINORITY RIGHTS

In order to increase public access to AHC’s initiative to improve respect for minority rights, AHC representatives, its district correspondents, and municipal council chairmen participated in local television programs in each of the municipalities where AHC is conducting an assessment. The programs were useful for sensitizing the public regarding the need to increase their participation in decision-making and to cooperate for better respect for minority rights by local government bodies. Based on the assessment findings, municipal councils will draft local strategies to improve their own work regarding minority participation in public life and decision making⁵.

5.3 Interviews and articles about emigrants’ rights

In the context of raising awareness about respect for the rights of Albanian emigrants in general and particularly those living in Greece in particular, during the period July-September 2007, AHC gave interviews and published different articles. Concretely, AHC showed attention to informing the public in Albania and Albanian emigrants in Greece about the decision of the European Court of Human Rights on the case “Çelniku vs. Greece,” a case defended by the Greek Helsinki Monitor in the context of the project implemented jointly with AHC. Also, Ms. Vasilika Hysi, Executive Director of AHC, gave an interview regarding AHC’s visit to Greece in May 2007. In the interview, the Executive Director outlined issues raised during the visit, meetings with Albanian emigrants, the Greek Ombudsman, and its sister organization the Greek Helsinki Monitor. For more, go to: <http://www.ahc.org.al/kshh/emigrantet/emigrantet2.html>

6. INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE ORGANIZATION

6.1 Capacity building for AHC’s staff

Increasing capacities of AHC staff and activists on addressing cases in the European Court of Human Rights

⁵ The above activities were realized in the context of the project “Increasing the role of the civil society and state institutions in the promotion and better respect for minority rights,” financially supported by CORDAID.

In the context of increasing the capacities of AHC staff and monitors engaged in providing free legal services for victims of human rights violations, on July 4-5, 2007, we organized the training course *“The European Court of Human Rights – its legal and practical aspects”*⁶.

Ms. Elira Kokona, jurist/referent at the European Court of Human Rights, and Mr. Ledi Bianku, lecturer at the Faculty of Law, offered training on issues such as: legal and practical aspects of the European Court of Human Rights; analysis of articles 3, 5, 6, 13 and 14 of the Convention; ECHR’s organization, structure, and impact on the Albanian juridical system; criteria for accepting a request and its drafting in practice when pretending violations of ECHR’s articles; ECHR’s investigation procedures, necessary documentation, and free legal aid offered by the Court; cases of interventions by interested parties in a judicial process and practical cases of ECHR.

Beneficiaries of the two-day training course included: legal clinic staff, AHC jurists, students of the Faculty of Law, AHC monitors, and representatives of the Albanian Disabilities Rights Foundation. AHC, thus contributed to building not only its own capacities, but also those of young jurists and jurists working for partner organizations.

Albanian Helsinki Committee trains its observers for the parliamentary by-election, September 23, 2007

To monitor the parliamentary by-election in constituency 31 in Tiranë, held on September 23, 2007, AHC accredited 20 longterm observers and trained them on September 19 on issues such as: the Electoral Code and its amendments, CEC instructions, methodology for monitoring the electoral process, and reporting methods. Part of the training were: the observer’s role, his/her qualities, how to present reservations to the commission, when needed, and reporting monitoring results.

⁶ The training was conducted in the context of the legal clinic project, supported financially by the Swedish Helsinki Committee.