

The civil society join towards fuller implementation of human rights in Serbia

Belgrade Centre for Human Rights

The ability of human rights defenders in Serbia to engage in the protection of human rights and to address deficiencies, whether in the legal framework or in practice, is decreasing. At the same time the need to intervene continues to increase.

The factors that limit the ability of civil society to intervene vary from region to region. But I believe there is one common factor across all regions - governments, the duty holders, do not value civil society's role in achieving social equity.

The expertise and capacities of civil society organizations (CSOs) are rarely used by the State to strengthen their intervention capacity towards fulfilment of its human dimension commitments. Only on exceptional occasions were a State's budget or planning cycle utilised as tools to ensure steady support of human dimension commitments.

At the same time, the practice of project-based funding for CSOs has resulted in a constant struggle for resources, thus diminishing the ability of CSOs to monitor, collect and corroborate relevant data on the human rights situation. This drain on financial resources inevitably leads to a drain on human resources as well, with the most experienced and knowledgeable staff pushed out the door.

To address some of these challenges, in 2018 16 CSOs in Serbia with extensive experience in the follow-up of recommendations and in dialogue with the UN Human Rights Mechanisms gathered. Together we established the *The Platform of Organizations for Cooperation with United Nations Human Rights Mechanisms*. From the outset, our efforts were supported by the UN Serbia Human Rights Team and the OSCE Mission to Serbia.

The goal of the Platform is to ensure that CSOs in Serbia have capacity to meaningfully interact through direct communication, not only with UN Human Rights mechanisms but also with relevant institutions at the national level.

Bearing in mind that after Second Cycle of Universal Periodic Review before the UN Human Rights Council, government of Serbia has fulfilled the recommendation 131.4 and established Council for Monitoring the Implementation of the Recommendations of UN Human Rights Mechanisms in 2014, the quality of interaction became especially important for CSOs in Serbia.

From the outset, the Council, led by the Office for Human and Minority Rights, has given due recognition to the role of civil society organizations (CSOs) in the development of a democratic Serbian society, and start with first activities in 2015.

CSOs agreed to participate in the work of the Council with a common purpose to spread human rights ideals throughout the country, to highlight human rights violations, to monitor government's progress towards implementation of recommendations and to join in discussion and debate as part of the Council.

We hold up our participation on the Council as an example of how civil society and government can maintain a dialogue to achieve social equity. As CSOs, our goal is to improve the understanding of the human rights issues among state institutions, and in doing so, to improve the lives of citizens of Serbia.