



G R U P A 484

Pukovnika Bacića 3
11040 B e o g r a d
Tel-Fax:(+381 11) 2660 972, 2660 973, 2664 856, 264 866, 3699 434
E – mail: office@grupa484.org.rs
Website: www.grupa484.org.rs

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5 October 2010, Warsaw

Dear Sir/Madam,

Supported by the OSCE, Group 484 has initiated a network of civil society organisations within the project “Fostering NGO Human Rights Network towards Durable Solutions for Refugees and IDPs in the Western Balkan Region”. Its goal is to instigate a regional initiative for the exchange of information and joint advocacy initiatives.

A group of civil society organisations, legal aid providers from the Western Balkan region have produced a policy paper that gives country by country overview of the availability and provision of legal aid to refugees/IDPs. The leading concept in developing this policy paper was the idea that the free legal aid is a necessity and the powerful tool in enabling refugees/IDPs to freely enjoy their rights, while at the same time access to justice without discrimination for all those in need proves to be a main instrument for the promotion of peace and peaceful settlements in a post-conflict society. The paper has been produced as a result of cross-border cooperation of 10 NGOs from Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro.

Free legal aid and information access for refugees is extremely important so that their decision about a permanent solution, return or integration, is based on full and valid information, and that all legal and other institutional capabilities related to access, protection and realisation of rights of refugees are used. Despite the fact that civil society organisations have for years provided some forms of legal aid to thousands of people, the system of free legal aid in Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Croatia is still under development.

During the past 15 years, only nongovernmental organisations have been providing independent, impartial and professional legal aid to refugees and displaced population. The key to establishing a good system of free legal aid to citizens has to be based on understanding and accepting the role of the state to respect, protect and realise human rights.

By providing an adequate system of legal aid and assistance to refugees and internally displaced persons for more effective protection and realisation of their property, labour, social, pension, status and other rights, the most direct contribution is given to finding durable solutions for their problems and resolving the refugee issue in the region of the former Yugoslavia (BiH, Croatia, Montenegro and Serbia)

We are inviting you to discuss this issue on **Side-Event on October 5, 2010.**
18.00 – 20.00 h Meeting Room 2.