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REPORT ON THE VISIT TO THE SPECIAL DETENTION UNIT OF THE BELGRADE DISTRICT PRISON

On May 18, 2004, Director of the Central Prison Administration Milos Jankovic invited the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia, along with representatives of relevant international organizations and the media, to visit the Special Detention Unit of the Belgrade District Prison on Thursday, May 19, 2004, with a view to evaluating conditions of life and treatment of persons under detention.

Upon arrival to the District Prison, the representative of the Helsinki Committee, Natasa Novakovic, and the prison director, Miroslav Micic, talked over the manner in which the visit would be conducted. She was informed that, due to security reasons, the visit did not include the entire Special Detention Unit, but was, in keeping with the approval given by the presiding judge, Marko Kljajevic, restricted to a visit to detainee Milorad Ulemek.

The detainee's lawyer, the director and one officer of the Central Prison Administration, the prison director and two security officers were present throughout the visit. Two reporters (for the Vecernje Novosti and Blic dailies) were present as well.

At the time of the visit, the detainee was accommodated in one of the rooms in the prison wing that was renovated a couple of years ago. The wing, known as Hyatt II, provides better conditions of life than the rest of the prison premises. For security reasons, detainee Ulemek is separated from other detainees and allocated to an individual cell. According to him, he has been occupying this room for some 15 days now.

The size of the room is adequate in terms of cubic meters. The room is freshly painted, clean and appropriately furnished (a bed, a table, a bench and lockers). Artificial lighting meets necessary standards. Because of the District Prison's layout, the room cannot possibly allow direct entrance of natural light and fresh air, or be directly heated. (See, the Helsinki Committee's reports on previous visits to this institution on www.helsinki.org.yu – Publications – Helsinki Files No 17 – How to Attain European Standards)

Immediately after admission, he was meticulously examined by the prison's doctor, said detainee Ulemek. The doctor's conclusions were entered into his medical file. As the detainee complained of ear infection, the doctor prescribed him an adequate treatment. The detainee did not complain of medical treatment or of the food. Further, he did not complain of the manner in which the prison staff treated him. He takes the staff conducts in accordance with the House Rules that were presented to him upon admission. He himself respects these Rules, says the detainee.

Detainee Ulemek exercises the right to family visits and is allowed to communicate with his lawyer at all times. He receives newspapers and book, but cannot watch TV.

Apart from the time reserved for family visits or communication with his lawyer, the detainee spends days in the room described in the paragraphs above. Under supervision of security officers and with no other prisoner present, he takes some 30-minute exercise in fresh air in the detention unit's walking grounds every day.

The Helsinki Committee expects that, instead of such *ad hoc* visits, domestic NGOs would be allowed in near future to visit persons in police custody and those awaiting trial in district prisons and interview them out of the sight/hearing of law enforcement officers without having to arrange such visits in advance or secure special permits.

The government would thus prove its readiness to fully implement international standards to which it bound itself by ratifying the European Convention on the Prevention of Torture, Inhuman or Degrading Punishment or Treatment, as well as by signing the Optional Protocol of the UN Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Punishment or Treatment.

Belgrade, May 20, 2004