



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## Report Shines Light on Domestic Violence in Montenegro

August 9, 2017—The U.S.-based Advocates for Human Rights, in partnership with two women's rights organizations in Montenegro—SOS Hotline for Women and Children Victims of Violence-Nikšić and Women's Rights Center—have issued a fact-finding report that identifies critical systemwide gaps inhibiting effective implementation of that and related legislation. The report is the latest in The Advocates' Women's Human Rights Report Series, which includes more than two dozen reports on a variety of women's human rights issues in Minnesota and throughout the world.

The LDVP is Montenegro's first domestic violence protection law since it declared independence from Serbia in 2006. Montenegro has also ratified important treaties relevant to combating violence against women, including the Istanbul Convention. The LDVP is an important step toward meeting its international human rights obligations.

More than half of married women in Montenegro have suffered domestic violence. They are discouraged from reporting it because of financial dependence on the abuser, fears of retribution and stigmatization, lack of trust toward institutions responsible for protecting victims, the absence of effective mechanisms to prevent repeat violence, and lack of information about their rights.

Adoption of the LDVP was a critical step in addressing some of these concerns. It addresses domestic violence between spouses and former spouses, consensual partners and former consensual partners, people who have a child in common, as well as between individuals, children, and other relatives in the family. It recognizes that the duty to provide victims of domestic violence with "full and coordinated protection" extends to many governmental, health care, and other institutions.

In 2015, a fact-finding team from the three organizations that issued the report conducted human rights monitoring to document problems with implementation of Montenegro's legislation. The fact-finding team visited six cities and conducted 60 interviews with government officials, police, judges, prosecutors, health care workers, and others and conducted followup interviews in 2016 and 2017. While they found that some good practices and initiatives have been established, they concluded that all actors in the domestic violence response system—police, Centers for Social Work, judges, prosecutors,

and health care workers—must receive training and standardized guidance on how to best implement the law and respond to domestic violence against women.

For example, according to the report: In some cases police lack knowledge of the specifics of the law and their responsibilities. In other cases, they fail to follow the laws and procedures because of their harmful attitudes and misperceptions about domestic violence.

Social workers sometimes prioritize concern for the offender's welfare over the victim's safety or exhibited skepticism about the victim's veracity. When children are involved, some social workers blame the nonviolent parent for fleeing the home or allowing the children to witness the abuse.

Prosecutors have authority to hold offenders criminally responsible, yet tend to downplay domestic violence, either relegating it to the misdemeanor system or encouraging reconciliation. The report details similar problems with family law, misdemeanor, and criminal court judges.

The health care sector lacks a standardized response to domestic violence. Neither do they proactively screen suspicions of domestic violence or consistently provide referrals to other resources.

The report documents other problems within the system as well and makes recommendations to remedy these problems in line with Montenegro's international legal obligations.

### **About The Advocates for Human Rights**

The mission of The Advocates for Human Rights is to implement international human rights standards in order to promote civil society and reinforce the rule of law. By involving volunteers in research, education, and advocacy, we build broad constituencies in the United States and select global communities. The Advocates has produced more than 80 reports documenting human rights practices in more than 25 countries, and works with partners overseas and in the United States to restore and protect human rights. The Advocates for Human Rights holds Special Consultative Status with the United Nations. [www.theadvocatesforhumanrights.org](http://www.theadvocatesforhumanrights.org)

### **About SOS Hotline for Women and Children Victims of Violence Niksic**

SOS Hotline for Women and Children Victims of Violence Niksic was founded in 1998 by a group of activists who dream about a society in which equality and social justice are core values. SOS Hotline is recognized as one of the leading NGOs in Montenegro in the fight for women's rights. SOS Hotline seeks to be a powerful instrument for women in economic, social and political empowerment. Its mission is to help the positive development and application of capacity and potential of women and children in the family and society,

through the promotion and protection of women's and children's rights in order to create a dedicated, responsible, and open community.

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### **About the Women's Rights Center**

WRC was established in 2012, on the basis of the founders' long-term experience in providing support to women survivors of gender-based violence and other violations of women's human rights. The Women's Rights Center (WRC) empowers women to fight for a better position in society and access to justice, offering them counselling, psychological and legal assistance. Through advocacy, monitoring and promotion of women's creativity, the Women's Rights Center improves conditions and the social atmosphere in which women exercise their rights. WRC advocates for gender equality as one of the priorities of Montenegro in the European integration process.

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