



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

The Advocates' Women's Human Rights Program and Croatia partner to present report on improving Croatia's domestic violence legislation to Parliament

Minneapolis / St. Paul, MN (9/18/12) - The Advocates for Human Rights, its Croatian partner, Autonomous Women's House Zagreb, and its Bulgarian partner, Bulgarian Gender Research Foundation, have released a new report, *Implementation of Croatia's Domestic Violence Legislation*. The groups will present that report to Croatia's Parliament, Board of Gender Equality, and other stakeholders next week. The report examines how Croatia's domestic violence and other laws are working to protect domestic violence victims and hold offenders accountable. To make this assessment, The Advocates traveled to Croatia in 2010 and 2011 to conduct interviews with victims, police, judges, prosecutors, social workers, and shelter personnel.

Domestic violence in Croatia is a serious problem. A study conducted in 2003 by the Autonomous Women's House Zagreb, reports that 41 percent of Croatian women have experienced some form of physical abuse by their marital or extra-marital partners. The Advocates and women's human rights advocates in Croatia are successfully working to improve this situation. Cheryl Thomas, Director of The Advocates' Women's Human Rights Program, says, "Croatia has become a leader in Central and Eastern Europe by passing one of the region's first domestic violence laws. The Advocates has welcomed this opportunity to work with our partners in Croatia to assess the law's implementation and recommend revisions to better protect domestic violence victims."

The report indicates that the implementation of the domestic violence law and other related laws have created several challenges, including widespread dual arrests—where both the offender and victim are arrested—throughout the country. Police are arresting both parties because of a troubling provision in the law that classifies "psychological" violence as domestic violence. This provision allows a victim who has verbally insulted her abuser to receive the same punishment as the abuser, who has physically beaten her. Also of grave concern are the massive funding challenges facing shelters for domestic violence victims in Croatia. There are only 18 shelters serving a population of 4.5 million people. Government funding for these shelters is often inadequate and delayed and some shelter workers have been giving up their salaries in order to keep the shelters open to protect victims.

For more information please contact:

Cheryl Thomas
Director, Women's Human Rights Program
(612) 746-4672
cthomas@advrights.org

Ellen Van Iwaarden
Director, Development & Communications
(612) 746-4677
evaniwaarden@advrights.org

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The Advocates for Human Rights, a nonprofit organization headquartered in Minneapolis, Minnesota, is dedicated to the promotion and protection of internationally-recognized human rights. To learn more about The Advocates' local, national, and international work, visit theadvocatesforhumanrights.org.