

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization - UNESCO
Regional Bureau for Science and Culture in Europe
Ms. Ana Luiza Massot Thompson-Flores, Director of Office

Podgorica, 18 January 2022

Ref: Notice on the misogynous hate-speech by member of the National Commission for UNESCO in Montenegro

Dear Ms. Thompson-Flores,

we are writing on behalf of the **NGO Human Rights Action (HRA)** founded in 2004, and **NGO Women's Rights Center** founded in 2012, both from Podgorica, Montenegro. Our goal is to promote respect for the rule of law based on human rights and gender equality. We wish for international human rights standards to be incorporated in legislation and implemented in practice.

I am addressing you regarding recent actions of **Mr. Jovan Markuš, member of the National Commission for UNESCO in Montenegro**, who by a sexist expression insulted MP Ms. Draginja Vuksanović Stanković, president of the Social Democratic Party, as well as all women in Montenegro as far as we are concerned, and moreover, encouraged spreading of hate speech by emphasizing that he sees no hatred in his doings.

Namely, on 11 January 2022, Mr. Markuš shared a [video](#) on his social media page on Twitter of Ms. Vuksanović Stanković from the political gathering with the written comment: "The virus of "Draginism" is spreading within the "*Patriotic Block*" with a folk song from the land of our cousins, from the Užice region - *Hey girl Draginja! I would like to bend you over!*". The expression "bend you over" is a sexist expression meaning "I would like to have sex with you".

Two days later, on 13 January 2022, Mr. Markuš on his social media page on Twitter posted a [link](#) to the same old folk song with a comment: "*Hej girl Mira! Hej girl Desa! Hej girl Draginja!*", with a clear reference to the politician Ms. Vuksanović-Stanković, representing a sexist insult.

Such statements of Mr. Markuš constitute a violation of dignity and encourage the maintenance and strengthening of gender stereotypes and hate speech and **are not in accordance with the purpose and principles established in the [UNESCO's Article I of Constitution](#)** stipulating that "the purpose of the Organization is to contribute to peace and security by promoting collaboration among the nations through education, science and culture in order to further universal respect for justice, for the rule of law and for the human rights and fundamental freedoms which are affirmed for the peoples of the world, without distinction of race, sex, language or religion, by the Charter of the United Nations". The statements are

not in accordance with **Article I of Charter of National Commissions for UNESCO** either.¹ Additionally, such statements are also not in accordance with the relevant **Resolutions of the General Conference adopted since 1978**.² We have approached the prime minister of Montenegro with a clear request to react, but neither he nor anyone from the Government failed to act to date.

This has not been the first incident of this kind of hate speech in the public discourse in Montenegro, unfortunately, but is the first one involving a state official related to UNESCO. We hope that you could support the effort to effectively combat sexist, misogynistic speech.

Therefore, we are kindly asking you to, in accordance with your competencies, write a letter to the Government of Montenegro and advise them to reconsider the membership of Mr. Markuš in the Government Commission for UNESCO and to initiate the procedure of removal from this function.

Such behavior is definitely not in accordance with the role and missions of [National Commissions](#) which should make substantial contributions in the advancement of UNESCO's objectives and in the implementation of its program.

Thank you for your attention and please do not hesitate to contact us for any additional information

Sincerely yours,

Tea Gorjanc Prelević

Executive Director

NGO Human Rights Action



Maja Raičević

Executive Director

NGO Women's Rights Center



¹ Charter of National Commissions for UNESCO, 1978, Article I, paragraph 1 (Purpose and functions): „The function of National Commissions is to involve in UNESCO's activities the various ministerial departments, agencies, institutions, organizations and individuals working for the advancement of education, science, culture and information, so that each Member State may: a) Contribute to the maintenance of peace and security and the common welfare of mankind by participating in the activities of UNESCO which aim to advance the **mutual knowledge and understanding of peoples, give fresh impulse to popular education and to the spread of culture, and preserve, increase and diffuse knowledge**; b) Play an ever-increasing role in UNESCO's work, and particularly in the formulation and execution of its programmes.

² Relevant Resolutions available on the following link: <https://en.unesco.org/system/files/451126208eng.pdf>