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In Brussels, 9 November 2023

**Open letter to the Government of Slovenia about the serious human rights abuses in psychiatric institutions**

Dear Prime Minister, Dear Ministers,

On behalf of the European Network on Independent Living – ENIL, we wish to express our **deepest concern about the violence and other human rights abuses committed against persons with disabilities in psychiatric institutions in Slovenia and the lack of response from the authorities**. We urge you to address this situation without delay, by protecting persons with disabilities in institutions, bringing those responsible to justice and implementing a comprehensive policy of deinstitutionalisation without delay. Such steps would be in line with Slovenia’s obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), as well as with the European laws and policies concerning the rights of persons with disabilities.

The European Network on Independent Living – ENIL has welcomed the positive developments in Slovenia, such as the Law on Personal Assistance and the increased opportunities for independent living by many persons with disabilities. In collaboration with our Slovenian member, YHD, we have repeatedly praised Slovenia in this respect and disseminated information about its positive efforts to implement Article 19 CRPD, on the right to live independently and to be included in the community.

We were therefore **surprised and shocked to learn of the systemic violence committed against persons with disabilities in the Ljubljana Psychiatric Hospital and other psychiatric institutions**, which have been reported in the media[[1]](#footnote-1), by NGOs and other institutions in the past months. In addition to the reports of violence, we were **appalled to learn of the absence of response by the relevant Ministries and your complete failure to address and rectify this situation**.

Specifically, we understand that there has been no public information made available about the investigation into the cases of abuse; no public information about the plan to protect the victims of violence and no public apology to the victims, or acknowledgement of the abuse they experienced.

Considering Slovenia’s commitment to promote the rights of persons with disabilities, we would have expected these and other concrete steps to be taken to protect the victims and bring those responsible to justice.

Finally, we wish to express our **concern about the slow progress towards the closure of institutions in Slovenia and the development of community-based alternatives,** which would allow all persons with disabilities to live in the community, in line with Article 19 CRPD. The situation that this Open Letter addresses is another reminder why the closure of institutions must be a priority, as violence and other human rights abuses are a daily occurrence in psychiatric hospitals and other residential settings.

Therefore, with full support to the demands published on 31 May by human rights activists, service providers, members of the academia and other high standing individuals of Slovenia, **we urge the Government of Slovenia to**:

* Protect persons with disabilities in psychiatric hospitals and other residential settings from violence and other human rights abuses, and specifically the residents of the Psychiatric Hospital Ljubljana;
* Present a concrete plan how the violence against persons with disabilities in psychiatric hospitals and other residential settings will be addressed and prevented in the future;
* Abolish all coercive practices in mental health services;
* Protect the rights of persons with disabilities who are victims of violence within mental health services and prevent such violence, including by ensuring that the Mental Health Act is amended to be fully in line with the CRPD;
* Make a public statement condemning violence;
* Urgently implement the process of deinstitutionalisation, in line with the CRPD, its General Comments and the *Guidelines on deinstitutionalisation, including in Emergencies*[[2]](#footnote-2);
* Ensure that the deinstitutionalisation strategy is comprehensive and covers all settings and facilities where persons with disabilities are placed, regardless of whether they are under the authority of the ministries of social affairs, health, education or other;
* Actively involve persons with disabilities and their representative organisations, including survivors of institutions, in the process of deinstitutionalisation in Slovenia.

We thank you for your attention and remain available for any further discussion with your Government on this important matter.

Sincerely,

Ines Bulić Cojocariu

Director

European Network on Independent Living - ENIL

**About the European Network on Independent Living**

The European Network on Independent Living (ENIL) is a Europe-wide network of disabled people, with members throughout Europe. ENIL is a forum for all disabled people, Independent Living organizations and their non-disabled allies on the issues of Independent Living. ENIL represents the disability movement for human rights and social inclusion based on solidarity, peer support, deinstitutionalization, democracy, self-representation, cross disability and self-determination.

ENIL’s vision is of Europe where all disabled people are able to exercise choice and control over their lives, on an equal level with others; where they are valued members of the community and can enjoy all of their human rights, as set out in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). ENIL’s mission is to advocate and lobby for Independent Living values, principles and practices, namely for a barrier-free environment, provision of personal assistance support and adequate technical aids, together making full citizenship of disabled people possible. For more information, please see: [www.enil.eu](http://www.enil.eu)

1. See: <https://n1info.si/poglobljeno/kaj-se-dogaja-na-psihiatricni-kliniki-ljubljana-razkrivamo-pricevanja-o-nasilju/>, <https://n1info.si/novice/slovenija/pricevanja-so-nas-sokirala-niso-pa-nas-presenetila/> and <https://n1info.si/poglobljeno/razkrivamo-nova-pricevanja-o-nasilju-bolnika-z-demenco-veckrat-brcnil-udaril/?fbclid=IwAR1Jjjho_yzbIyOk9PBC3AKwWHYabBpUnXxN0dmFvtnoPBX0D1Cfm62c3V8> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/legal-standards-and-guidelines/crpdc5-guidelines-deinstitutionalization-including> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)