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PRESS RELEASE

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The District Court again acquits police officers accused of abusing Roma boys at a police station in Košice

At today's hearing, the Košice II District Court again - for the third time - acquitted the police officers accused of abusing Roma boys at a police station in Košice in March 2009. According to the court, neither the additional evidence proved that the incident took place as alleged by the indictment of the prosecution.

The District Court decided on the case for the third time. It already acquitted the police officers accused of violence against Roma boys in 2015 and 2017. However, the appeal court quashed both of its previous decisions while stating that the proceedings at district level were incomplete and that further evidence must be performed in order to complete the findings of facts and clarify any ambiguities. At the same time it also ordered the District Court to demonstrate as an evidence a video-sound recording that captures a part of the violent incident.

At today's main hearing, the District Court demonstrated the given recording. But despite of that it again acquitted the accused police officers stating that even additional evidence has not unequivocally proved that the incident took place as alleged by the indictment of the prosecution. The District Court again pointed at the alleged contradictions in the testimonies of the aggrieved Roma boys that, in its opinion, were not removed by the evidence.

Center for Civil and Human Rights (Poradna) - Slovakia based NGO - provides ongoing free legal assistance the affected Roma boys. Vanda Durbáková, an attorney working with Poradna and legal representative of the boys reacted:

"I find today's court decision unjust. In my view, the evidence that has been performed before the court was - in their joint connections – sufficient to condemn the defendants. It is paradoxical that people can clearly see the violence that the aggrieved Roma experienced during their detention at the police station on the existing video recording. But for almost 10 years, the state authorities, including domestic courts were unable to condemn perpetrators for the wrongdoing that is unacceptable in democratic society."

The decision of the Košice II District Court is not final. The prosecutor is going to appeal the verdict.

Background of the case

In March 2009 a number of police officers detained six Roma boys between aged 11-17 and brought them to the Košice – South police station. There, the officers allegedly forced the boys to strip, slap each other, and carry out other police orders that violated their human dignity. The officers also allegedly threatened the boys with a loaded weapon and provoked the police dogs to attack the boys. Some of the actions were recorded on a mobile phone and the edited footage was published online by a daily newspaper SME. The

Department of Control and Inspection Services at the Slovak Ministry of Interior launched criminal investigation in the summer of 2009. In the spring of 2010, based on the results of the investigation, the General Prosecutor brought criminal charges against ten police officers. The charges also included abuse of power by a public officer with a racially motivated intent.

Contact information: Vanda Durbáková - the legal representative of the aggrieved Roma boys: +421 908 695 531 or vanda.durbakova@poradna-prava.sk

The Center for Civil and Human Rights (Poradna) is a non-governmental organization based in Slovakia focused on the protection of human rights with particular emphasis on the rights of minorities and protection from discrimination. Poradna has for a long time worked on the issue of discrimination against Roma ethnic minority in various areas of public life. It has also been active in the protection of reproductive rights and protection from police brutality. Poradna employs strategic litigation to combat discrimination and human rights abuses against minorities. Poradna offers free legal advice to victims of discrimination and in selected cases free legal representation to victims of discrimination before Slovak courts and the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg. It also conducts monitoring in the field, advocacy, and educational activities on the protection from discrimination for lay and expert audiences. **Visit us at:** www.poradna-prava.sk

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