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Open letter to the Bulgarian Ministry of Justice, the Bulgarian Government and the European Society

From: Jock Palfreeman

Chairman of the Bulgarian Prisoners' Rehabilitation Association

On the 15/12/2012 Florenzo Tandini an Albanian citizen in 10th group Sofia Central Prison was arguing with another prisoner in their cell. There was no physical fighting, when about 8 guards with batons ran into the 10-A cell and stuck Florenzo Tandini on his left side of his face with a baton. Florenzo Tandini attempted to cover his face from the blows of all 8 guards who surrounded him and beat him to the ground repeatedly. All the strikes were to the face and back of the head which is apparent when looking at the documented wounds to his face and head. There are no other wounds to the rest of Florenzo's body. There was no physical or verbal resistance from Florenzo towards the guards of Sofia Central Prison, either prior to their attack nor during or after.

After beating him in 10-A cell, they locked all the cells and beat Florenzo again in the corridor, again all the guards beat him including the 2nd Officer in Command on the 15/12/2012, Guard 'Svetlo' and again they all used their batons and again on his face and head.

After this the guards took all of the prisoners in 10-a cell to the 3rd post of Sofia Central Prison where they separated Florenzo from the others in his cell. 3 were put into the commission waiting room at 3rd post while Florenzo was put into a holding cell at 3rd post that has both a wooden door and bars. There Florenzo was repeatedly assaulted by guards with batons. This time more than 8 were involved as guards were called from other sectors of the prison to engage in the mass beating of Florenzo.

This is not a rare happening in Sofia Central Prison and the guard on prisoner assaults have drastically increased since 2009 when Mitko Dimitrov was appointed Director of Sofia Central Prison. After Mitko Dimitrov was promoted by the GERB Ministry of Justice, Peter Krestev was appointed as Director of Sofia Central Prison. Prior to Peter Krestev's appointment the former Director of Sofia Central Prison had forbidden the guards from carrying weapons as routine and instead weapons including batons were only carried in reaction to a major disturbance. Peter Krestev since his appointment has allowed guards to carry weapons, including batons as routine and this has created an environment of indifference amongst the guards and their officers in command. As guards carry batons and are very bored at work they constantly abuse their posts and with batons in hand this leads to serious assaults. A prisoner can walk past a guard who is holding a baton and simply as that guard is bored he will hit the prisoner on the head or back with the baton. If the guards were only allowed to carry batons in response to serious threats as was the case prior to 2009 the amount of assaults from guards against prisoners and their seriousness would be greatly reduced.

Also of importance to note is the leadership of Sofia Central Prison that has allowed an environment of violence to flourish amongst the guards. Prior to Peter Krestev's appointment there were of course instances of guard brutality towards prisoners. But they were rarer and also the prison administration took actions against the guards involved which dissuaded uncontrolled violence against prisoners. Now however not a single guard has been disciplined by Peter Krestev or the Commandant Yordanov for assaulting prisoners. To think that from Director Peter Krestev's appointment of about 2 years to the present there hasn't been a single case of guard brutality against prisoners would be absurd, yet that is what Peter Krestev would have us believe. Every act of brutality inflicted by the guards is covered up by

the Sofia Central Prison's administration and Director Peter Kretev's unwillingness to take actions against the guards and their commanding officers for such assaults has given the green light to the guards and their officers to not only assault prisoners more readily but also more severely.

The Director Peter Kretev instead of fulfilling the requirements of his position as Director of Sofia Central Prison has taken a position of 'us vs. them'. He is incapable of separating his personal emotions from his work where objectivity is essential to fulfilling not only the requirements of his position but also for the fulfilment of the laws that govern the prison. The Director's position is not only to discipline prisoners who act outside the limits of the law. The director's position is also to discipline the prison's staff who act outside the parameters of the law and this is something that Peter Kretev is apparently unable and unwilling to do.

The Director Peter Kretev failed to prevent or punish the staff involved in the mass rapes that occurred in 8th group in late 2011. He has not changed or enacted measures to prevent a mass rape from happening again in Sofia Central Prison. This latest documented mass assault by guards upon Florenzo Tandini is just another case of the brutality that has flourished under the leadership of Director Peter Kretev.

We demand that a full check by the government should be carried out as to the way Sofia Central Prison has been run since the appointment of Peter Kretev as Director of Sofia Central Prison. Especially considering that Peter Kretev was appointed through the ex-Head Director Mitko Dimitrov. All appointments made during ex-Head Director Mitko Dimitrov's appointment should be reviewed especially in regards to directors of Bulgarian prisons.