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**Unofficial translation**

**Human Rights Commissioner  
in Transnistria  
V.N.Kosinsky**

Dear Vyacheslav Nikolaevich,

According to the generally accepted international standards, in case of restrictions of his human rights activities in a certain territory, including when a state of emergency is declared throughout the country or in certain areas, an Ombudsman continues to be responsible for taking measures regarding human rights, in accordance with his mandate in the field of monitoring and enforcement of human rights.

The People's Advocate (Ombudsman) welcomes the measures taken by *de facto* Transnistrian administration to curb the spread of coronavirus COVID-19, but is also concerned about some restrictions that impede the access of residents of Transnistria and surrounding settlements to vital services and institutions.

Unfortunately, the introduced rules for entry and exit from Transnistria restrict the access of people with low-income, people with health problems, people with disabilities and elderly people to medical services and medicines compensated from compulsory health insurance funds. Specifically, for more than 19,000 residents of Transnistria, the Government of the Republic of Moldova acts as an insurer, to guarantee their access to a compulsory health insurance system designed to cover the costs of treating conditions caused by the insured events. Basically, these are people with cardiovascular diseases, respiratory diseases (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, bronchial asthma), osteoarticular diseases (osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis), and diseases of the endocrine system. Today, they are unable to receive medications through the Family Medicine Centers that are compensated from compulsory health insurance funds to ensure the outpatient supportive (long-term) treatment.

At the same time, due to measures taken to contain the virus, such as a restricted access to their jobs, to receiving wages and pensions paid through the banking system of the Republic of Moldova, the situation of people has been significantly aggravating.

In a statement dated March 16, 2020, Geneva, the UN human rights experts declared that states should not use excessive measures to restrict human rights. In turn, National Human Rights Institutions are key and have enormous potential to ensure greater respect for human rights and freedoms in emergency situations.

"COVID-19 is a test for our societies, and we are all learning and adapting as we respond to the virus. Human dignity and rights need to be front and center in that effort, not an afterthought," emphasized the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet in her address.

Of course, emergency measures that restrict the right to freedom of movement can be justified in the current circumstances. However, under international law, measures restricting freedom of movement and other rights must be proportionate, time-limited, taken for legitimate purposes, strictly necessary and non-discriminatory.

Emergency measures should be introduced in a safe and respectful manner and, if possible, should be voluntary. The rights of those in quarantine should be respected and protected: the right to food, the right to humane treatment, the right to health, the right to information, the right to access to drinking water, freedom of religion or belief, and freedom of expression.

Those with ongoing illnesses (HIV / AIDS, diabetes, mental illness, etc.) or have other specific medical needs, including those using opioid substitution therapy (OST) and harm reduction services, should continue to receive adequate treatment.

Among the most vulnerable during the COVID-19 pandemic are people with low-income, isolated rural people, people with ongoing illnesses, people with disabilities, homeless persons, elderly people living alone or in social institutions, migrants with limited access to health services, asylum seekers, refugees, stateless persons, children, drug users and other people in need of help.

Authorities must take into account the needs of homeless people, taking into account that it can be very difficult for them to resort to measures of social isolation. Any actions aimed at meeting their needs should not be punitive and should follow the principle of protection of their rights to health.

Particular attention should be paid to the needs of older people, especially those who live alone or feel unwell due to cognitive impairment / dementia or other mental illnesses. Older people should receive accurate and accessible information about the COVID-19 outbreak and, if necessary, should be instructed on how to use protective equipment (masks, disinfectants), how to order food on the Internet, etc.

With regard to children, the authorities should ensure: the presence of guardians providing care if one of the parents or another primary caregiver is hospitalized; comprehensive psychosocial support for hospitalized children; the development of emergency plans for children who experience long periods of lack of formal education; where appropriate, based on age and the availability of technology, it is necessary to ensure the continuation of lessons using remote IT solutions so that children can continue to learn and take advantage of the educational system.

“Self-isolation” can lead to loss of wages and jobs, which can have a long-term impact on people's livelihoods. Authorities must be prepared to respond in various ways to unintended consequences of their actions to reduce the spread of infection. Businesses also have a role to play, including responding flexibly to the adverse effects of a pandemic on their employees.

Based on the foregoing, guided by the universally recognized powers of the National Human Rights Institutions, as a People's Advocate, I express my openness to cooperate with a view to identifying ways to resolve human rights problems in the context of the epidemiological situation, while applying a human rights-based approach to the pandemic management in order to contribute to the recovery of society through the rule of law and the protection of human rights.

Also, I ask you to help resolve the problem associated with people's access to their places of residence, their workplaces, banking system institutions on both banks of the Dniester River, as well as to Family Medicine Centers.

I can't but agree and sign on to the words of the UN Head Antonio Guterres, who emphasized: “The pandemic drives home the essential interconnectedness of our human family. We are in this together – and we will get through this, together.”

Sincerely,

**People's Advocate (Ombudsman)  
of the Republic of Moldova**

**Mihail COTOROBAI**