



Bratislava, January 26<sup>th</sup>, 2016

## **Open Letter about the Violation of the Basic Human Rights**

The Slovak Teachers Initiative, an independent teacher's movement from Slovakia, tries to achieve changes in education. We consider the state of the education system to be so serious that after many unsuccessful attempts to induce the Government of the Slovak Republic to solve this situation, we decided to implement our constitutional right and on January 25<sup>th</sup> 2016, we started a strike, in which more than 11 000 education workers are participating.

Unfortunately, due to the development of the situation in the following days, we feel we have reached a point in which our struggle to improve education is changing into to a struggle to maintain democratic values and rights in Slovakia. As teachers we know the situation at schools intimately and we counted with a certain degree of pressure on the teachers and the public from those from whom we demand these changes.

However, we were shocked by the extent and intensity of intimidation and pressure from the official authorities and headmasters as well as from the organizers.

We have been informed about dozens of cases of teacher intimidation or direct pressure to end their strike.

Pressure and intimidation has many forms: claims that the strike is illegal, that it could jeopardize teacher employment, future existence of the school, its public image, future possibility to raise funds for the school, as well as emotional blackmail that teachers on strike are harming children and/or headmasters.

Many headmasters (e.g. in Trenčín Self-Governing Region) are called into meetings, where the organizers "reprimand" them because they did not handle the situation well and let their teachers enter the strike. There are also told that they should ensure the provision of at least some kind of lessons at their school at any cost. Many organizers do not provide legally required methodical help to school which are trying to exercise their constitutional right, but instead are looking for a way to prevent and disrupt these attempts.

Several headmasters have been told that if their teachers join in the strike, the school will lose subsidies or receive less money from the state (regulation).

Teachers at one school in Povazska Bystrica were forced to write a statement that they voluntarily decided not to take part in this strike. One of the teachers was not able to cope with the situation and handed in her notice.

At another school in Povazka Bystrica teachers were required to fill in a paper stating when they are planning to end their strike – allegedly for the purpose of managing their health insurance.

A teacher from East Slovakia was told that if she joined in the strike and her pupils achieve bad results in the nation-wide testing Testovanie 9, there will be legal consequences for her.



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In some cases, the teachers who are also members of the largest Union of school teachers and scientific employees and wished to strike were accused of breaking the terms of the collective agreement.

Headmasters write and call the Slovak Teachers Initiative demanding that the information that teachers from their school are on strike is taken down from the website [www.isu.sk](http://www.isu.sk) and are trying to find out who registered the school so that there can be repercussions against this person.

During the strike, some headmasters want to forbid the striking teachers to enter the school building. Striking teachers are placed into the role of subversives whose victims are children, parents and the whole teacher collective.

Teachers' freedom of speech is often suppressed under the pretence of loyalty to school and politicizing of education. Any critical statements made by teachers and oriented at schools are considered to be defamation by the headmasters. In this context, Municipal authority of the Košice allegedly issued a ban for the teachers to talk with the mass media.

Teachers are prevented from expressing their attitude. In Prešov Self-Governing Region teachers allegedly received from a recommendation not to attend a meeting with the President of the Slovak Republic, to which they had been invited.

On Saturday, January 23<sup>rd</sup> 2016, the Section for Regional Education sent a document entitled "The Statement of the Prime Minister Róbert Fico and the Minister of Education Juraj Draxler to the planned strike of a part of the teachers" was sent to all the schools and all types of our schools. We consider the content of this document to be a political campaign and manipulation.

We have spoken with many intimidated teachers personally or on the phone and can confirm that they are worried and afraid. This effectively prevents them to freely express their opinion on the situation in education.

Slovakia is the country with the highest share of women working in education from among all OECD member states. Their bad financial situation and minimal possibility to find jobs are the reasons of their passive attitude in the case of manipulation and intimidation. The position of women and mothers in education is suppressed and abused and suppressed in education.

Since we fear that the above mentioned problems might constitute cases of discrimination or violation of basic human rights and liberties, we decided to ask you to give a statement to the above mentioned cases, as well as initiate a detailed investigation into the matters of intimidation, mobbing and bossing in schools and all types of our schools. We have complete materials at our disposal.

Best regards

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