

PROXY OBSERVER

SEÑALAMOS A LOS CULPABLES DE LA VIOLENCIA

Spot Report: Protest for the Treatment of Patients with Hepatitis C (Ministry of Health, Madrid)

Prepared for:

Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe OSCE
Permanent Mission of Spain to the OSCE
Argentinierstrasse 34A
1040 Vienna
Austria

Prepared by: Emilio Esteban (Proxy Observer co-ordinator)

Reference: *Cadena Humana en el ministerio de sanidad* (10 December 2014)

INTRODUCTION:

The following is a brief “Spot Report” for the purpose of informing the OSCE on the latest social protest to take place in Madrid, Spain. In our conclusion we will make recommendations and suggest ways of improving public safety while ensuring civil rights.

LOCATION & DATE OF PROTEST:

The protest took place in Madrid on the 27th of December, 2014 at 12:00. More specifically, the location chosen was the Spanish *Ministry of Health*, since the protest related to health issues, mainly Hepatitis C.

THE ORGANISERS:

The event was organised by [@PLAFHC](#) a social group made up of Hepatitis C patients, their families, friends and supporters, with the sole aim of persuading the government in Spain to give the necessary treatment to all Hepatitis C patients.

Other pressure groups and political organisations were also present at this protest, including representatives of *Podemos* (a new political party), protesting *Coca Cola* workers, trade unions and the PAH (an anti-evictions group).

BACKGROUND TO THE PROTEST:

Until only last year, a cure for Hepatitis C was unavailable, with only the option of controlling the disease through various treatments being available. In 2013 alone, 4,000 people died of Hepatitis C in Spain, an average of 12 a day.

With the production of a new treatment against Hepatitis C, which leads to a full recovery and the elimination of the virus, Hep C patients suddenly had the possibility of being cured, and not just treated.

The Spanish government however, considers that the new treatment, known as *Sovaldi*, is “too expensive” to be given to the 135,000 estimated Hep C patients, and has only committed itself to treating 17% of the more advanced cases.

THE EVENT:

The organisers of the protest outside the *Health Ministry* in Madrid, had arranged to form a “human chain” which would surround the entire building. This was achieved by people joining hands.

As is always the case, those protesting did so peacefully. Speeches and testimonials of those campaigning for the treatment were read out, and a chorus group known as *Solfonica* sang various songs to round off the event.

POLICE PRESENCE:

Police presence was generally low key. Police vans kept their distance, and UIP officers were not seen verbally harassing protestors. No unwarranted ID checks were carried out.

On occasions however, UIP police officers asked protestors to move towards the pavement, in order to allow traffic to flow freely.

On a more negative note, many Spanish police officers continue to disregard the law, failing to properly identify themselves. A dozen or more UIP officers at this protest had their ID numbers missing from their uniforms.

When confronted about the absence of ID numbers, they retorted that they had “*forgotten their ID numbers at home*”. Curiously, UIP police officers rarely have this problem with regard to their guns.

INJURIES and ARRESTS

No injuries or arrests were reported. No bag searches or unnecessary mass ID checks were carried out. The police did not video tape those present at the event or threaten to take anyone to the police station under the pretext of an ID check.

SECRET POLICE & INFILTRATORS:

Secret police were either not present at this event or they kept a very low profile. There was no attempt by *agent provocateurs* from the *Interior Ministry* to disrupt the protest.

THE AUTHORITIES

The authorities in Madrid appear to see everything in strictly political terms, including the issue of saving human lives with adequate medical treatment. Many Hep C patients see the government's reluctance to treat them as an "ideological" decision, as opposed to a financial one.

The conclusion by Hep C activists is that the Spanish government puts "patents before patients" (*patentes antes que pacientes*) and that company profits, rather than human lives, are the priority when deciding annual budgets.

On January 10th 2015, the group which organised this event will form another human chain, stretching from the hospital where they are currently holding a sit-in, to an area of Madrid known as Moncloa.

REPORT CONCLUSIONS:

Our conclusion is that Hepatitis C patients have broad support from both the media and citizens. The press were very much present at this event, and TV cameras recorded every last move by the police.

Perhaps it was this mass media presence, which led to the "softly softly" approach used by the authorities and police during this protest. The sudden appearance of TV cameras is the best guarantee citizens have that their rights will be respected.

Unfortunately, within a few months Spain's new authoritarian gag law (*Ley Mordaza*) comes into force, making the recording of police officers during a legal protest "illegal", with severe consequences for political activists and the press.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We suggest that the OSCE reminds Spanish authorities of the importance of complying with the law with regard to police ID numbers. It has become the norm for UIP officers to flout this law. This must be corrected.

Report dated: 4/January/2015

Relevant Videos:

TV Report on the protest outside the health Ministry <https://vid.me/7JJ5>

TV report: “human chain” <https://vid.me/cVhv>

For more information, photographs and videos on this event visit our web site:
<http://proxyobserver.weebly.com/informes.html>