



EUROPEAN NETWORK OF (EX-)USERS AND SURVIVORS OF PSYCHIATRY

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CZECH REPUBLIC MUST STOP CAGING HUMAN BEINGS



Source: http://www.tyden.cz/rubriky/domaci/pacientka-lecebny-se-obesila-na-sitovem-luzku_223512.html

February 22, 2012 – Prague, Czech Republic.

The caging of human beings is a gross violation of international human rights law. Yet it continues to be acceptable 'treatment' for psychiatric patients in the Czech Republic. The European Network of (Ex-) Users and Survivors of Psychiatry (ENUSP) has learned of the recent suicide of a woman in a caged bed at Dobřany psychiatric clinic near Plzeň. According to reports in the Czech press, the 51-year-old woman hanged herself in the cage on the morning of January 20, 2012. She had been locked inside just hours earlier after being reported "restless". Staff noted she had a history of self-harm. A security camera above the cage transmitted continuous images to the nurses' station, but no one intervened as the woman took her life. A police report ruled out foul play. But local activist and ENUSP Deputy Board Member Michal Caletka said the woman's death exposes the extreme abuse and neglect being endured by people inside Czech mental hospitals:

"She made a hole in the netting big enough to shove her head in there... Obviously nobody was watching her and as usual, nobody is responsible for it. I don't know how

long it takes to prepare a hole like that and suffocate oneself, but, I believe, long enough to notice on the camera...”

Caletka, himself a survivor of psychiatric caging, said distressed people are typically heavily drugged, tied to beds and kept in solitary confinement. Contact with staff is kept minimal. There is no public oversight.

“It is a quite common practice to lock everyone up and overmedicate [them]...The patients are left there on their own most of the day. Who cares?”

At least five other people have met “unexpected, unnatural and violent” deaths while being restrained in cages in Czech psychiatric wards in recent years, according to ENUSP’s research. In 2006, 30-year-old Vera Musilova was found dead in a cage in Prague’s Bohnice hospital after she choked on her own faeces. She had been caged continuously for two months, and was naked, dehydrated, and dirty, with her head shaven. A recent Court of Appeal judgment held that the hospital didn’t owe the woman’s mother an apology for her daughter’s treatment.

LIVES THAT DON’T MATTER

Net cages and other restraints remain legal and in use in psychiatric ‘care’ across the Czech Republic despite heavy criticism from the international human rights community. The European Commission, the United Nations, the Council of Europe and psychiatric survivors have all condemned these barbaric responses to people in crisis. Author J K Rowling called for the banning of caging, declaring the practice “torture”.

Despite promises to end caging around the time of EU accession in 2004, the Czech Republic openly shuns its international law duties when it comes to psychiatric patients. The country has ratified multiple UN human rights treaties prohibiting torture. These include the Convention on the Rights of Person with Disabilities (CRPD). The CRPD, designed to protect the rights of people in psychiatric settings, states:

“No one shall be subjected to torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.”

ENUSP is aware that these rights are being mocked and betrayed daily inside psychiatric settings in the Czech Republic and elsewhere. After the death at Dobřany, prominent psychiatrists, including the head of Protective Treatment at Prague’s Bohnice hospital Jiří Švarc, pronounced the cages “one of the mildest forms of restraint”. They say that staff will resort to more severe techniques if caging is banned. Michal Caletka responds:

“We’re horrified this is the only way that mental health professionals know how to respond to people in distress: different kinds of torture and punishment. Many people turn to the mental health system because they want help with a serious crisis in their lives. All they get is a whole new layer of abuse and suffering.”

A CALL FOR ACTION

The use of caged beds violates every aspect of human rights and dignity; it is grotesque, degrading, and torturous.

The damage to the human person resulting from this act of torture cannot be estimated. ENUSP is extremely concerned about the gross violations of human rights and dignity now taking place in Czech psychiatric wards. As Human Rights Commissioner Thomas

Hammarberg said last year: "There is an atmosphere of impunity surrounding these violations."

We urge the international community to take action by sending messages to the Czech Ministry of Health.

SAMPLE MESSAGE

I am shocked and outraged by the recent death of a woman locked in a caged bed at Dobřany psychiatric clinic near Plzeň.

I demand that the Czech government immediately bans and removes all caged (metal and netted) beds in psychiatric hospitals and any other treatment settings in the Czech Republic

I demand that the Czech government immediately bans all violent, forced and non-consensual psychiatric procedures, which are a replacement for real care. These procedures includes bed strapping, solitary confinement, and drugging, detention and institutionalisation against a person's will. None of these practices are acceptable alternatives. They are human rights violations according to the UN Special Rapporteur for Torture and the UN Committee on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. They must stop.

Signed,
Country:

Please send your message to:

Czech Ministry of Health

E Mail mzcr@mzcr.cz

PO Box 81, Palacky ul. 375/4.128 01 Prague 2, Czech Republic

Source: <http://praguemonitor.com/2012/01/26/pr%C3%A1vo-mental-hospital-patient-strangles-herself-caged-bed>

About the European Network of (Ex-) Users and Survivors of Psychiatry



EUROPEAN NETWORK OF (EX-)USERS AND SURVIVORS OF PSYCHIATRY (ENUSP) is the only independent network of mental health service users and survivors of psychiatry at a European level. Our members are regional, national and local organisations and individuals from 39 countries united in the fight for human rights and self-determination. In addition to maintaining a Europe-wide support network, ENUSP has campaigned for the last nineteen years to end discriminatory and abusive treatment of users and survivors of psychiatry and

advance accessible alternatives in the community. Our efforts help to expose coercive psychiatric treatment as a major human rights violation which must be dealt with through changes to public law and policy. We are consultants to the European Commission, the United Nations and other major public and non-profit bodies.

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