



PRESS STATEMENT: IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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TOPHÁZ: MDAC RESPONDS TO OMBUDSMAN AND MINISTRY FINDINGS

BUDAPEST – The Hungarian Ombudsman and the Ministry of Human Capacities have confirmed MDAC’s findings of grave and systematic human rights violations against the residents of Topház, including inhuman and degrading treatment and discrimination. MDAC welcomes these findings but remains deeply concerned for the safety and welfare of the residents of this institution.

The reports show that these problems are not new. The situation has worsened at Topház since the Directorate-General for Social Care and Child Protection (“SZGYF”) took over control of this and other institutions in recent years. We have no confidence that this agency can assist the residents of Topház adequately, and are deeply concerned to read that the institution may continue in existence for many more years.

The Hungarian Civil Liberties Union (“TASZ”) is [appealing](#) for family members and guardians to come forward, and will provide free legal assistance.

MDAC does not accept that the situation in Topház is unique. Hungary incarcerates 23-25,000 people with disabilities in institutions that are closed from public view. This is why we have demanded that civil society be guaranteed access to all institutions immediately, without arbitrary interference. Legislation should immediately be passed so that MDAC, civil society and persons with disabilities can visit all institutions in the country.

Steven Allen, MDAC Campaigns Director, said:

“The reports of the Ombudsman and Ministry validate MDAC’s findings of torture and ill-treatment against the people in Topház. The victims must now receive reparations, compensation and rehabilitation. They have a right to free and independent legal assistance and we urge parents or guardians to come forward. Perpetrators must be held to account, including those who supervise and maintain this institution at SZGYF, who clearly knew what was going on.

Since the publication of MDAC’s report, Ministers have refused to meet with MDAC, despite repeated requests. Instead, they have made false and defamatory allegations



through the media which they must now withdraw. This is not the time for politics but action. MDAC and our partners are ready to enter into proper dialogue on all aspects.”

MDAC calls on Minister Zoltán Balog to take responsibility and agree to an immediate meeting with our representatives, where he must inform us about the current situation of people at Topház, and emergency assistance that has been provided to residents. He should update us on plans to move people out of Topház and back into the community, including the process and timeline.

At this meeting, MDAC will also share findings from visits that have taken place to other residential institutions in Hungary by our representatives. The findings from other visits clearly show systemic problems and a national deinstitutionalisation policy which requires fundamental reform.

ENDS

NOTES FOR EDITORS:

- Putting people with disabilities in institutions violates their right to live, with support, in the community under Article 19 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Hungary ratified this international treaty in 2007.
- The Directorate-General for Social Care and Child Protection (“SZGYF”) states on its website that it maintains 112 institutions in total, made up of 66 social care institution, 39 child protection facilities, 5 mixed facilities, and two others). Regional offices of SZGYF took over the maintenance of institutions as far back as 2013.
- The current national deinstitutionalisation strategy (until 2036) covers only 10,000 persons with disabilities, out of an estimated 23-25,000 people who continue to be detained in institutions.
- Last week, the Hungarian Ombudsman reported that the conditions inside Topház Speciális Otthon (“Topház Special Home”) gravely violate the fundamental rights of residents, including protection against inhuman and degrading treatment under international law.
- Yesterday, the Ministry of Human Capacities, represented by Károly Czibere, stated that a special investigation had been concluded. However, Mr Czibere seemed to say that Topház will remain open for another 6 years.
- On 6 May, MDAC asked Vice-President of the European Commission, Frans Timmermans to step in due to potential misuse of EU funds at Topház. This call was reiterated in Brussels at a conference at the European Parliament and a subsequent press briefing.