

GRE 001 / 1011 / OBS 120

Threats / Harassment

Greece

October 26, 2011

The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, a joint programme of the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) and the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), expresses its deepest concern regarding the following situation in **Greece**.

Description of the situation:

The Observatory has been informed by the Greek Helsinki Monitor (GHM) about the threats as well as the abusive and racist messages made against Mr. **Thanassis Tartis**, attorney and legal counsel working for GHM, and Mr. **Panayote Dimitras**, GHM Spokesperson and a member of OMCT General Assembly.

According to the information received, on September 20, 2011, after a hearing of a trial against coastguardsmen held before the Naval Court of Piraneus for violation of Article 2 of the Antiracism Law 927/7, following two complaints filed by GHM and the Group of Lawyers for the Rights of Migrants and Refugees, in relation to racist statements expressed publicly by 39 members of the Hellenic Coast Guard during their participation in the 2010 Greek Independence Day Parade, on March 25, 2011, Mr. Thanassis Tartis¹ was pursued by supporters of the coastguardsmen who had already shouted outside the courthouse the same racist slogans used by the latter, in order to support the tried coastguardsmen, but he managed to escape. The police did not react neither against the agitators nor to grant protection to the threatened ones.

Subsequently, hundreds of abusive and racist messages appeared on the Internet directed at Messrs. Thanassis Tartis, Panayote Dimitras, who submitted one of the two original complaints and testified during the preliminary examination, and Pavlos Voskopoulos, many of which contained direct threats against their physical integrity and even their lives, as well as incitements to violence against them and/or their deaths. On September 29, 2011, the three men decided to file a complaint against the authors and instigators of the threatening messages and asked the Minister of Citizen Protection to provide them with police protection. Their request has been ignored to date.

The Observatory expresses its concern about the threats and acts of harassment against Messrs. Thanassis Tartis, Panayote Dimitras and Pavlos Voskopoulos, and believes that these acts actually aim at intimidating and sanctioning their human rights activities in defending victims of minorities subjected to racism.

Actions required:

Please write to the Greek authorities urging them to:

- i. Guarantee in all circumstances the physical and psychological integrity of Messrs. Messrs. Thanassis Tartis, Pavlos Voskopoulos and Panayote Dimitras;

¹ In the hearing, Mr. Thanassis Tartis submitted petitions to gain standing as civil claimants by two citizens of the Republic of Macedonia and Albania, who reside in Greece, whose claims were upheld by the court. Mr. Tartis is also the attorney for two other persons who sought standing as civil claimants, an Albanian citizen who lives in Albania, and Mr. Pavlos Voskopoulos, a representative of the Macedonian minority in Greece, whose claims were rejected by the court.

- ii. Order a thorough and impartial investigation into the above-mentioned acts in order to identify all those responsible, bring them before a civil competent and impartial tribunal and apply to them the penal sanctions provided by the law;
- iii. Conform with the provisions of the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, adopted on December 9, 1998 by the United Nations General Assembly, especially its article 1, which states that "everyone has the right, individually or in association with others, to promote the protection and realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms at the national and international levels", and its article 12.2 which provides that "the State shall take all necessary measures to ensure the protection by the competent authorities of everyone, individually and in association with others, against any violence, threats, retaliation, de facto or de jure adverse discrimination, pressure or any other arbitrary action as a consequence of his or her legitimate exercise of the rights referred to in the present Declaration";
- iv. Ensure in all circumstances respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in accordance with international human rights standards and international instruments ratified by Greece.

Addresses:

- Mr. George Papandreou, Prime Minister, Prime Minister's Office at the Hellenic Parliament, Greek Parliament Bldg, Constitution Square, Athens, Greece. Fax: + 30 210 3238129, Email: pressoffice@primeminister.gr
- Mr. Stavros Lambrinidis, Foreign Minister, Athens, Greece, Fax: + 30 210 36 81 433, Email: info@mfa.gr
- Mr. Miltiadis Papaioannou, Minister of Justice of the Hellenic Republic, Ministry of Justice, Mesogeion 96 Av., 11527 Athens, Greece, Fax: +30 2107755835 E-mail: minjust@justice.gr
- Ms. Calliope Spanou Greek Ombudsman., Fax: +30 210 7292129
- H.E. Ambassador George Kaklikis, Ambassador, Permanent Mission of Greece to the United Nations in Geneva, Rue du Léman 4, 1201 Geneva Switzerland, Email: missionofgreece@bluewin.ch, Fax: +41 22 7322150
- Permanent Mission of Greece to the European Union, 25 rue Montoyer, 1000 Brussels, Belgium, Fax: +32 2 512 79 12 / + 32 2 551 56 51. Email: mea.bruxelles@rp-greece.be

Please also write to the diplomatic representations of Greece in your respective countries.

Geneva-Paris, October 26, 2011

Kindly inform us of any action undertaken quoting the code of this appeal in your reply.

The Observatory, a FIDH and OMCT venture, is dedicated to the protection of Human Rights Defenders and aims to offer them concrete support in their time of need. The Observatory was the winner of the 1998 Human Rights Prize of the French Republic.

To contact the Observatory, call the emergency line:

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