

Greece: No access to the asylum procedure and persistent failure to improve the situation of detainees in prisons and police stations



OMCT, GHM, MRG-G and SOKADRE submit an alternative report to the Committee against Torture

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Today, the United Nations Committee against Torture will review Greece's compliance with the UN Convention Against Torture. The World Organisation against Torture (OMCT), Greek Helsinki Monitor (GHM), Minority Rights Group - Greece (MRG-G) and the Coordinated Organizations and Communities for Roma Human Rights in Greece (SOKADRE) have submitted to the Committee against Torture a report entitled "State Violence in Greece: An alternative report to the United Nations Committee against Torture" and "Impunity and Indifference - An update on the "Aghia Varvara" case. In this report, they provide information on the lack of implementation by the State Party of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and suggests concrete recommendations to be addressed to the authorities.

The NGO's address the persistent failure over years to improve the situation of detainees in police stations and in overcrowded prisons, despite 14 judgements by the European Court of Human Rights finding detention conditions in Greece to be in violation of the European Convention of Human Right's article 3 (Prohibition of torture and ill-treatment). Indeed cruel, inhuman and degrading detention conditions over a prolonged period of time,

in addition to severe administrative shortcomings, are used as a deterrent to prevent migrants to lodge asylum claims.

“The Greek asylum procedure effectively bars individuals entitled to international protection from having their situation assessed” says Panayote Dimitras, spokesperson of the Greek Helsinki Monitor.

Unaccompanied alien minors, many of whom are prevented from accessing the asylum procedure, are extremely vulnerable to human trafficking, labor exploitation, prostitution and drugs, and most often end up living on the street due to the failure of the state to protect and near inexistence of initiatives to address their needs. The complete absence of guarantees of street children’s rights in Greece is revealed in the “Aghia Varvara” case, where between 1998 and 2002 several hundred children in the Greek authorities care escaped from a state institution, and remains unaccounted for to this day. *“The Greek authorities have a responsibility to investigate the fate of these children, and identify disciplinary and criminal responsibility,”* says Panayote Dimitras.

The use of police violence is of special concern to the OMCT, GHM, MRG-G and SOKADRE. “We are particular alarmed over persistent accounts confirming that the Roma population continues to be particularly vulnerable to ill-treatment by the police, notably in relation to forced evictions. Persistent impunity compounds these violations”, says Guro Nilsen, OMCT.

Journalists are another group subjected to police violence, as witnessed during the protests at Syntagma Square on 5th of April 2012. This is particularly alarming considering the key role a free press plays in democratic societies.

The NGO coalition particularly highlight the importance of ensuring the right to remedy and reparation, including compensation, for the victims of state violence in Greece, as well as sanctions of the individuals responsible for the acts in cases which has been ascertained by international human rights bodies like the European Court of Human Rights and the United Nations Human Rights Committee. Redress including compensation is essential elements of providing justice and rehabilitation to these victims, many of whom have fought for justice for many years.

The UN Committee Against Torture is composed of independent experts overseeing the implementation of the UN Convention Against Torture. After today’s review of the State party’s report, they will produce detailed recommendations to address gaps in Greece’s fulfilment of its obligations under the UN Convention Against Torture.

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