



*HELLENIC REPUBLIC*  
**NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR HUMAN RIGHTS**

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**Oral Statement**

**On the implementation of the International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of  
Racial Discrimination (ICERD) in Greece  
4 August 2016**

The Greek National Commission for Human Rights (GNCHR) warmly thanks the CERD Committee for the opportunity to present our views during the examination of Greece on the implementation of the Convention.

In our 68-page information we have addressed a number of issues of relevance to the present examination. Most of these concerns are interconnected and may be summarised in two major points, one of which relates to the particular circumstances of the country at the present time and the second relates to the established procedures and practices of the Greek State.

During this past year Greece has faced an unprecedented refugee crisis as almost a million people arrived on our shores and passed through the country on their way to other countries in Europe and beyond. These massive migratory flows were met with an impressive wave of solidarity as the whole country has supported the plight of refugees, migrants, asylum seekers, with a large number of unaccompanied minors and other vulnerable groups, in spite of the ravages of the on-going economic crisis on both the state systems and private incomes. However, in the aftermath of the EU-Turkey deal, on which the Greek National Commission for Human Rights has already issued a statement of grave concern, the way forward has been closed and a total number of almost 57.000 persons find themselves stranded on the Greek territory. The GNCHR has urgently appealed to the Greek State, the UN, the EU institutions, all EU Member States and all the international organisations involved, in a spirit of responsibility, solidarity and sincere cooperation, to take all appropriate measures with a view to ensuring the protection of human life, health and safety of all people living in Greece and the effective management, in conditions of dignity, of the migratory flows towards the EU. In this regard, we have repeatedly insisted on the need to re-design the EU asylum system along with the Dublin System, with a focus on human dignity and the safeguarding of long established human rights – and not merely on ways to stockpile human beings in some Member States. However, as it becomes increasingly clear that this group of people –as well as others who steadily arrive in recent weeks– are to stay for an undetermined period of time, there is a need for immediate action to avoid any rolling back in the fight against racism and xenophobia. As young Syrian families move into subsidised housing, as large numbers of Arabic and Farsi-speaking children are to be integrated into the Greek school population, as people drifting out of the camps compete for unskilled, low paid work in the informal economy in a wider environment of high unemployment, as vulnerable groups make additional demands on an already crumbling health system, there is concern that hate speech may reach new levels and racist incidents may increase. We, in the Greek National Commission, remain particularly vigilant in this respect: on the

preventive side, we have issued a series of statements, most recently on the educational needs of children with disabilities and other vulnerable groups, including refugee children; and on the practical side, we continue to actively support the Racist Violence Recording Network members, hosted in our premises in collaboration with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees Office in Greece and with the participation of more than 35 NGOs and other bodies, providing legal, medical, social and other supporting services in direct contact with victims of racist violence, which remains the most effective mechanism for the avoidance of underreporting of hate crime in the country to date. Although the Network's methodology and most of its observations are now considered as common ground and data published by the Network constitutes a reference point for national and international human rights institutions. However, the responsibility to systematically record hate crimes is primarily a State one.

In order to achieve on this and avoid a resurgence of racist policies, already with a political representation in Parliament, we need to rely more and more on the established procedures and practices of the Greek State. We have contributed and continue to be actively involved through consultation and reporting with every attempt to further ameliorate the regulatory framework and the institutional arsenal of the country. We welcome novel ideas and new instruments, which would further enhance the effectiveness of such actions. In this context and with the purpose of developing a comprehensive national strategy to combat racism and intolerance in Greece, the GNCHR welcomes as a first very positive step the establishment by the Greek Ministry of Justice of the National Council against Racism and Intolerance, in which both the GNCHR and the Racist Violence Recording Network are represented.

We do believe, however, that instead of toying with more or less important architectural elements of the system, we need to concentrate on the full and effective implementation of that system: we need to allow existing mechanisms to fully develop their potential over time, so that we may safely evaluate their efficacy and then undertake corrective action concentrated on possible deficiencies. We need to allow judges and prosecutors to familiarize themselves with the relevant rules and create a substantive and robust corpus of case-law combatting hate speech, including in the social media. We need to accord the social and enforcement services of the state the time and space to fully develop their potential and achieve verifiable, measurable results. And we need to continue monitoring the implementation of the rules and thus the effectiveness of the system every day. It might not be the most glamorous job imaginable but this implementation review is a signal of both the consistency of state action and the depth of our commitment in rapidly changing social circumstances – which include not only the aftermath of the economic and migratory crises but also the continuing care, among others, for the Roma population, vulnerable groups and the society at large.

I thank you for your attention and I would be happy to answer any queries you might have.

Professor Maria Gavouneli  
Chair, Sub-Committee on International Cooperation