

HELLENIC REPUBLIC
GREEK NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

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PRESS RELEASE

“In Samos, the system has collapsed”

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A delegation of the Greek National Commission for Human Rights (GNCHR), consisting of Giannis F. Ioannidis, First Vice President, Foivos Iatrellis and Spyros Apergis, Members, and Eva Tzavala, Legal officer, visited Samos on 20 and 21 January 2020 to monitor the implementation of the GNCHR's previous recommendations towards the State regarding the refugee and migration issue, to draw preliminary conclusions regarding the course of

implementation of the new law 4636/2019 on International Protection and finally to detect possible new challenges in the field as a result of the large number of foreigners trapped on the islands inside and outside of reception and accommodation centres. In the context of the visit, an inspection of the areas of the Reception and Identification Centre (RIC) and the makeshift camp that has been created around it took place, as well as meetings with the Mayor of Eastern Samos, the Regional Vice-Governor of Samos, the public authorities and services and representatives of international and non-governmental organizations active in the field.

The Greek National Commission for Human Rights (GNCHR) is the independent advisory body to the Greek State on matters pertaining to human rights protection. It was established by Law 2667/1998 and is functioning in accordance with the UN Paris Principles. Its 41 members are nominated by institutions whose activities cover the field of human rights (NGOs, trade unions, independent authorities, universities, bar associations, political parties, Parliament and the Administration).

The GNCHR ascertained that the situation regarding the reception and the living conditions of asylum seekers in and around the Reception and Identification Centre (RIC) in Vathy, Samos is out of control and diminishes every concept of human dignity of the persons living in its areas. Emphasis is laid on the fact that while the RIC was designed to host up to 648 persons, today inside and around it live in containers, tents and makeshift shacks 7.208 persons (according to the latest official data). The services, which by law, the European acquis and the Constitution a state must guarantee, range from limited to non-existent, especially regarding housing, healthcare, psychosocial support, legal aid, interpretation and children's access to education, while at the same time the staff of the services of First Reception and Asylum Service are working under continually more burdensome conditions. The same is true a fortiori for the protection of minors, who do not enjoy the proper protection from public guardians, as well as for the rest of the vulnerable groups which are in imminent danger, a situation that necessitates the urgent adoption of measures for the termination of the serious violations of their rights. It is also noted that the common ground of the assessments of all actors, namely both the representatives of the local communities as well as everyone active in the field, is that closed centres are not the solution, but possibly will create new human rights and public order issues.

The imminent termination of the entrapment of asylum seekers on the islands emerges as an absolute necessity, not only for reasons pertaining to the respect of fundamental human rights and the establishment of social peace, but also in order for the treatment of asylum seekers and the system of international protection as a whole to become fundamentally manageable. The GNCHR makes an urgent public plea for the consideration of all the parameters and the appropriate reevaluation of the institutional and administrative framework of the refugee flows with respect to human rights, a process that must in any case be devoid of the toxic rhetoric in the public discourse. The GNCHR will continue to closely monitor the situation on the islands as well as the whole of the country and will publish a detailed report with its conclusions and recommendations.