

PRESS RELEASE

It is with regret that we note that once again the Asylum Department of the Aliens' Directorate of Athens is adopting and implementing policies that constitute a flagrant violation of the fundamental right of asylum seekers to have access to the asylum procedure. The previous policy of accepting only a very limited number of asylum applications was recently replaced by a complete suspension of the process of accepting new asylum applications. The consequences of this practice were not difficult to predict: during the weekend of 25-26 October, after having been barred from the asylum process for two months, an unprecedented number of asylum seekers (around 3000) queued up outside the building of the Aliens' Directorate at Petrou Ralli Street, in order to claim asylum under conditions which degraded their human dignity. The response of the police was to resort to violence in order to repel the crowd; as a result, many were injured while the death of a migrant during these events is being treated as suspicious following witness accusations.

Once again we underline that the right of asylum seekers to have full, continuous and unhindered access to the asylum process is guaranteed under international and national law and cannot be impaired on grounds of possible problems of an administrative nature. The policies adopted by the Greek administration leave asylum seekers exposed to the risk of arrest and expulsion.

The above-mentioned events demonstrate the unsuitability and inadequacy of Greek police in handling asylum issues in a way that meets international standards. As long as the police handles asylum cases, we expect and fear that such events of suppression will reoccur. In any case, the lack of political will to protect asylum seekers and refugees is apparent.

We demand accountability both for the events of 25-26 October 2008 as well as for the violations of the asylum process.

Athens, 10 November 2008

- **ARSIS- Social Association for the Support of Youth**
- **Ecumenical Refugee Programme**
- **Greek Helsinki Monitor**
- **Group of Lawyers for the Rights of Migrants and Refugees (Athens)**
- **Group of Lawyers for the Rights of Migrants and Refugees (Thessaloniki)**
- **Hellenic League for Human Rights**
- **Movement for Human Rights- Solidarity with Refugees in Samos**
- **National Focal Point on Racism and Xenophobia- KEMO**
- **PRAKSIS**
- **"PROS-FYGI", Initiative for Solidarity with Refugees in Mytilini**