



RACIST VIOLENCE RECORDING NETWORK

PRESS RELEASE

FATAL ATTACK ON IRAQI IN ATHENS

Athens, 15 August 2012 - Prompted by the fatal attack on a young Iraqi, on Sunday 12 August 2012, in the centre of Athens, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR) along with the 19 NGOs and other bodies that constitute the Racist Violence Recording Network* strongly condemn, once again, acts of racist violence and call on the Greek Government and competent authorities to take immediate measures to address the escalation of racist attacks.

Brutal attacks and hate crimes, which are racially motivated, against migrants and refugees on the basis of the colour of their skin, their religion or their country of origin have increased dramatically and have become an almost daily phenomenon in Greece.

The fact that the perpetrators of such attacks operate almost undisturbed, in a systematic and organized manner and in teams often led by extremist elements, is an issue of serious concern. Such criminal acts, perpetrated by groups on motorcycles, have been documented since March 2012 and condemned by the Racist Violence Recording Network. However, the competent authorities have not taken any particular measures to prevent and address such acts which, as a result has contributed to an escalation of violence.

To date, the criminal justice system has not resulted in the conviction of any perpetrator of violent racist attacks. This combined with the fear of the victims, often for lack of legal documents, to file complaints with the competent police authorities, but also the inability or reluctance of the law enforcement authorities to carry out arrests, contribute to maintaining and fuel the vicious cycle of violence.

The Network strongly condemns all acts of violence, whatever their origin. In instances, however, where such violence becomes systematic and organized, targeting foreigners, under the pretext of 'cleansing' of public space, by groups proclaiming that they guarantee public safety, combined with the lack of decisive and immediate response by State and national institutions, we are faced with a situation threatening Greek society as a whole, offending its culture and exposing the country internationally.

Confronted with such a situation, which poses a threat to the rule of law and democratic stability, the Network:

- Urges the authorities to exhaust all means to arrest and bring to justice the perpetrators of the recent murderous attack, as well as all those involved in acts of racially motivated violence.
- Calls on the justice system, including prosecutors, to exercise its legal powers and verify any possible source of information to effectively prosecute those responsible.
- Asks the police to demonstrate zero tolerance towards such behaviour and criminal acts.
- Stresses the need for the creation of a mechanism to record incidents of racist violence, as well as for guarantees to protect the victims and witnesses, to enable them to denounce such acts without the fear of arrest or retaliation.
- Calls on the competent authorities to intervene decisively on websites and social media, whenever racist speech openly instigates acts of violence and criminal acts, a phenomenon that has recently reached alarming proportions.

Finally, the Network is calling on the Greek Government, political parties, media, public figures and all citizens to refrain from statements and actions which aim at all foreigners in a generalized manner without distinction, thus fuelling xenophobia.

END

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** The **Racist Violence Recording Network** was set up at the initiative of the National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR) and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees in Greece (UNHCR), with the participation of 19 non-governmental organizations and other bodies, including: Aitima, Antigoni – Information and Documentation Centre on Racism, Doctors of the World, Amnesty International, Hellenic League for Human Rights, Greek Helsinki Monitor, Greek Council for Refugees, Greek Forum of Migrants, Greek Forum of Refugees, Human Rights Commission of the Bar Association of Rhodes, “Babel” Day Centre, Movement for the Support of Refugee and Migrant Rights (Patras), METAdrasi, Integration Centre for Working Migrants - Ecumenical Refugee Program, Group of Lawyers for the Rights of Refugees and Migrants, Group of Lawyers for the Support of Refugee and Migrant Rights (Thessaloniki), Forum of Migrants in Crete, i-RED Institute for Rights, Equality and Diversity and PRAKSIS, as well as the Greek Ombudsman as observer.*