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Public Statement

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Greece: Trial against Professor Takis Alexiou

Amnesty International wrote today to the Greek Minister of Justice, Mr Anastasios Papaligouras, to express its concern about a 25-month sentence passed earlier this year on Professor Takis Alexiou, an internationally renowned academic, writer, and artist as well as founder of the Greek Rumi Committee and President (1994-1996) of the Panhellenic Historical & Philosophical Society (PANIFE). He was sentenced on 1 July 2005, by the court of first instance in Rhodes, in spite of the Court Prosecutor's own request for his acquittal, and faces an appeal hearing tomorrow, also in Rhodes.

Charges were brought against Professor Alexiou after a resident of Simi called as a witness a Greek Orthodox monk, Arsenios Vliagoftis, member of the Greek Ecclesiastical Commission Against Heresies, which considers the Greek Rumi Committee a sect (number 105 on the Commission's list) and claims that the "heresies" which it propagates "*threaten to corrupt [Greece's] religious and national identities*".

The Greek Rumi Committee studies the philosophical and poetical works of Mevlana Celaleddin Rumi. In 1989, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization included the works of Mevlana Celaleddin Rumi, a 13th century philosopher, poet and humanist, on its list of worldwide literary treasures, part of humanity's cultural heritage.

The first instance sentence against Professor Alexiou not only contradicts Article 13, paragraph 1 of the Greek Constitution, which guarantees the freedom of religion and expression, but also the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms which Greece ratified in 1974.

Should the sentence be confirmed at the appeal hearing and Professor Alexiou imprisoned, Amnesty International would consider him to be a prisoner of conscience and would call for his immediate and unconditional release.