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GREECE: SYSTEMATIC AND PROLONGED DETENTION OF IRREGULAR MIGRANTS AND ASYLUM-SEEKERS PROVOKES RIOT

Amnesty International expresses once more its profound concerns over the prolonged periods of detention of irregular migrants and asylum-seekers and the very poor detention conditions in various immigration detention facilities and police stations in Greece.

These were the reasons that led people detained in detention centre of Amygdaleza to start a riot last Saturday evening in protest of the treatment they were receiving. According to reports, the riot was prompted by people detained in the centre after finding out that they would be held up to eighteen months and not twelve months as they were originally told; police guards cut off the electricity in two of the containers used as sleeping areas after the migrants started using the air conditioning; some were hit and verbally abused by police guards when they refused to get back to their containers.

In a press release issued by the Attika General Police Directorate, on 12 August 2013, the Greek police stated that the detainees attacked the police and set fire to mattresses and sleeping areas. The riot was stopped following the intervention of the riot police. It was stated that 10 police officers were injured and 41 migrants (from Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Morocco) were arrested and that they would face charges of causing of unrest and serious bodily harm. The Ministry of Citizens' Protection also underlined that the aim is to detain each and every irregular migrant until he/she is returned to his/her country unless the competent bodies claim that he/she is entitled to international protection.

The organization was informed by lawyers that the migrants arrested during the riot were beaten by the police when transferred at the Petrou Ralli detention facility in Athens. According to further reports, the police has also stopped people in Amygdaleza from going out of their containers after the riot despite the unbearable heat.

During the organization's visits at the Amygdaleza detention facility in April and July 2013, detainees expressed their despair over their prolonged detention and reported amongst others poor quality of food, poor hygiene and difficulties of speaking to their families with limited access to phones. Both police and detainees spoke about their concerns over hygiene in view of the lack of funding to employ cleaners in the detention facility. In recent months, the organization also received allegations of ill-treatment of some detainees transferred from Amygdaleza to the Eleftherios Venizelos airport in order to be deported.

Detention conditions and the lack of procedural safeguards surrounding detention in Greece have been regularly criticized by human rights organisations as well as the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment and Punishment (CPT) and the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA). Furthermore, between 2009 and the end of 2012, the European Court of Human Rights has found Greece in breach of Article 3 in 11 cases concerning the detention conditions of refugees and migrants held in immigration detention centres or border guard stations.

The Greek authorities must end the practice of systematic and prolonged detention of irregular migrants and asylum-seekers; and, investigate without delay all allegations of abuse by police guards prior to the riot in Amygdaleza and in Petrou Ralli detention facility.