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Greece: Trial against Professor Takis Alexiou continues

Amnesty International is concerned about a 25-month sentence passed last 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. After his appeal was postponed on 6 December last year, Professor Alexiou's appeal hearing takes place on 14 March, also in Rhodes.

Charges were brought against Professor Alexiou in a case involving allegedly defamatory actions following a divorce involving other people who were members of PANIFE. Professor Takis Alexiou appears to have been charged on the basis of his leadership of the Greek Rumi Committee and PANIFE. A witness called to the trial, Arsenios Vliagoftis, a Greek Orthodox monk and a member of the Greek Ecclesiastical Commission Against Heresies, testified that the Commission considered the Greek Rumi Committee to be a sect (number 105 on the Commission's list). The Commission apparently claims that the "heresies" which the Rumi Committee propagates "*threaten to corrupt [Greece's] religious and national identities*". In the Court of first instance, the Court held that: "*Nevertheless, it was proven that all the above was a well organized plan of the third defendant, who was Chairman of the aforementioned organizations [the Greek Rumi Committee and PANIFE], which have been characterized by the Holy Synod [of the Greek Orthodox Church] as heretical; it was proved that with the teaching and various other methods (hypnosis) he managed to have full control of the conscience of the members of these organizations, who called him Master, to such an extent that he could exercise control even on their lives.*"

Amnesty International is concerned that Professor Takis Alexiou is being targeted for prosecution because of his conscientiously-held beliefs; he has reportedly been under judicial investigations several times in the past on similar charges; none have led to a conviction.

The first instance sentence against Professor Alexiou not only contravenes 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, after the fall of the military dictatorship.

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.

Background:

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. It will celebrate the 800th Anniversary of Mevlana Celaleddin Rumi's birth in 2007.