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Greece: Investigate police chief's alleged call targeting migrants

The Greek authorities must launch an immediate investigation into instructions allegedly given by the Greek Chief of Police that irregular migrants must be detained for as long as possible to make their “lives unbearable”.

The comments, allegedly made during a meeting with other police officials, were reported today in the Greek journal HOT DOC.

The Chief of police is reported to have said:

“If they told me I could go to a country ..., and would be detained for three months and then would be free to steal and rob, to do whatever you want... that is great.

We aimed for increased periods of detentionwe increased it to eighteen months...for what purpose? We must make their life unbearable...”

“If accurate, the deeply shocking statements attributed today to the Greek Chief of Police would expose a wilful disregard for the rights and welfare of refugees and migrants seeking shelter and opportunity in the European Union,” said John Dalhuisen, Amnesty International’s Director for Europe and Central Asia.

“The Greek authorities must establish whether these remarks were made and take appropriate action to ensure that Greek law enforcement officials uphold the law and protect the rights migrants.”

“In a context where the Greek police has come under increasing scrutiny for alleged ties to the far right party Golden Dawn, these reported remarks from Greece’s most senior law enforcement official cannot be swept under carpet. Confidence in the integrity of the Greek police requires a thorough and independent investigation into the authenticity of these remarks.”

Over the course of the past year, Amnesty International and other non-governmental organizations have documented numerous cases of ill-treatment and illegal push-backs of refugees and migrants at the Greek-Turkey border. Amnesty International has also documented appalling conditions of detention in centres for irregular migrants and asylum-seekers.

According to HOT DOC, a number of police officers present at the meeting described the comments as unlawful and racist.

Under EU legislation irregular migrants can be detained for periods up to 18 months, but only for so long as there is a realistic prospect of their deportation and if, after an individual assessment, a less restrictive measure would not be appropriate.

Amnesty International is not in a position to confirm the authenticity of the statements attributed to the Chief of Police.

The spokesperson of the Greek police has not yet replied to a request for a response.