

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## PRESS RELEASE

AI Index: EUR 25/005/2004 (Public)  
News Service No: 176  
12 July 2004

### **Greece: Olympic Games must not lead to a trade off of security for human rights**

Amnesty International is concerned about reports that refugees, migrants, asylum-seekers and the homeless are being rounded up and detained as the Greek government mounts the biggest security operation in the history of the Olympic Games.

"There is a real danger that the security measures around the games will also undermine further the social and economic rights of vulnerable minorities such as the Roma," Amnesty International said.

*A group of Romani families' economic and social rights were eroded after they were evicted from their homes in the vicinity of the Olympic Stadium construction site. The Greek authorities failed to uphold an agreement to subsidize their rent in alternative accommodation as well as to permanently rehouse them. 137 people are affected - they have not been receiving their rent subsidies and monthly payments regularly. Some families allege that they faced discrimination while looking for new accommodation and when they finally found a house to rent they have lost it because they did not receive their rent subsidies from the local municipality on time.*

"The Greek government must protect athletes, officials, journalists and spectators. It is responsible for the security of its citizens and guests. However, this must not happen at the expense of human rights, especially the human rights of vulnerable groups," Amnesty International said.

Amnesty International is concerned that under the pretext of building up security, state officials are violating, with impunity, basic human rights and encouraging discrimination on racial grounds. The organization is concerned about:

- Lack of transparency in the way the security apparatus will operate, particularly regarding mechanisms for control and accountability;
- Muslims being targeted in a discriminatory manner in the name of security;
- Violation of the rights of immigrants, asylum-seekers and refugees;
- Violation of the basic human rights of socially marginalized groups of people;
- Impunity for security and state officials;
- The new legislation on "terrorism" that does not fully guarantee a fair trial and does not clearly define "terrorist acts".

In 2001, in a case brought against Greece to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg by an asylum-seeker waiting in detention for expulsion, the European Court noted that conditions of detention

may sometimes amount to inhuman or degrading treatment.

Amnesty International has been concerned about conditions of detention in Greece. In July 2004, Amnesty International addressed the Greek government about the conditions of detention in high security prison facilities at Korydallos Prison. The organization had received information that the conditions of detention amounted to inhuman and degrading treatment, including poor hygiene in cells, lack of access to association, fresh air and exercise facilities, and lack of prompt medical treatment.

The European Convention on Human Rights to which Greece is a party stipulates that everyone who is arrested or detained is entitled to proceedings by which the lawfulness of his/her detention is to be decided speedily by judicial authority and release ordered if the detention is not lawful. The Convention stipulates also that no one shall be subjected to torture or to inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

"Olympic Games conducted against a backdrop of security measures which violate human rights would be the very antithesis of the games' original purpose to promote peaceful competition, the pursuit of excellence and common humanity," Amnesty International said.

As the Olympic Games are returning to the city of their revival and the country of their origin, Amnesty International calls on the Greek government to give concrete guarantees that all human rights of all people in Greece will be fully respected and upheld and all measures undermining human rights will be promptly amended or withdrawn.

### **Background**

The Olympic Games in Athens, the first Summer Games since the September 11 attacks on the USA in 2001, will start on 13 August amid unprecedented security measures. The Greek government is spending over one billion US dollars on security, and deploying tens of thousands of security officers and troops to guarantee the security of the games. A number of other countries are sending their own security experts to Athens. Border controls are being tightened and sea and air surveillance stepped up.

Greek officials have announced that a disused military camp in Athens is being transformed into a detention centre for non-Greek visitors who break the law.

Public Document

\*\*\*\*\*

For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566  
Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW. web: <http://www.amnesty.org>

For latest human rights news view <http://news.amnesty.org>