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Public Statement

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Greece: Albanian human rights defender and journalist at risk of expulsion

Amnesty International wrote yesterday to the Greek Minister of Public order, Mr Michalis Chrysochoidis, to express its concern about Mr Gazmend Kapllani, an Albanian Human Rights defender and journalist at risk of expulsion.

Gazmend Kapllani came to Greece in 1991 and is currently studying for his PhD at Athens Panteion University, for which he was granted a State scholarship. He is the President of the Albanian Migrants Forum and is a well-known activist on racism and migrant issues.

On 26 February 2002 Mr Kapllani submitted his application with all supporting documents to the authorities in order to renew his residence permit. The following day, his application was rejected on the grounds that he presented a "threat to Public Order and National Security".

In an interview with the newspaper *Eleftherotypia* on 3 May 2003, the Ombudsman declared that he was unable to intervene in the case but added that "from the very beginning we established the unconstitutionality of the relevant regulations that gave the opportunity to the police authorities to take arbitrary measures against foreigners, claiming vague reasons of order and national security".

"The vague and unsubstantiated decision taken by the Ministry of Public Order to refuse to renew Mr Kapllani's residence permit on grounds that he presents a threat to "national security" raises serious concerns about its arbitrary character," Amnesty International said. Moreover, Amnesty International is seriously concerned that if this decision, which appears to be based on legal procedures which the Ombudsman declared unconstitutional, is enforced Gazmend Kapllani will have been labelled as a "threat to national security", which carries serious consequences for his future but without his being able to challenge this charge.

Two weeks after the rejection of his application for a residence permit, on 15 March 2003, police officers detained Gazmend Kapllani without arrest warrant at the National Security Headquarters on the grounds that he had been driving a motorbike that was not insured in 1997.

Amnesty International believes that this incident, coupled with a previous attack by a Greek member of parliament against Gazmend Kapllani for his statement that "the future of Europe is multicultural; the homogeneity of states as we know it does not exist any more", creates the impression that the measures against Mr Kapllani are being taken because of his outspoken views and activities on behalf of migrants.

"We call on the Greek authorities to either substantiate their allegations against Gazmend

Kapllani or to renew immediately his residence permit in Greece," Amnesty International said.

Public Document

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