

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

PUBLIC STATEMENT

AI Index: EUR 25/009/2012

19 October 2012

GREECE MUST ENSURE UNIMPEDED ACCESS TO ASYLUM DETERMINATION PROCEDURES

“The Greek authorities must take urgent measures to ensure that asylum-seekers in the Greek territory have unimpeded access to asylum determination procedures, particularly those trying to apply at the Attika Aliens’ Police Directorate,” said Marek Marczyński, Amnesty International’s Deputy Director of Europe and Central Asia Programme.

Amnesty International has reiterated its concerns for several years about the serious impediments faced by asylum-seekers in Greece when they attempt to register their asylum applications. Their application for asylum needs to be registered by the police authorities in order for them to receive a pink card (a paper proving that the asylum application has been registered). Those unable to register their asylum claims live in fear of arrest, detention and face the risk of *refoulement*.

Saturdays on Petrou Ralli Avenue

The vast majority try to apply for asylum at the Attika Aliens’ Police Directorate in Petrou Ralli avenue, Athens. Long queues of asylum-seekers including minors wait for two to three days outside the Directorate to lodge asylum applications each Saturday morning. They wait in line despite the extreme winter cold or summer heat. There are no toilet facilities and they risk injury when fights break out for a place.

Only a small number of applications (usually up to 20) are registered by the Attika Aliens’ Police Directorate authorities in the early hours of each Saturday. The authorities themselves state that during the week they receive applications only from members of vulnerable groups referred by lawyers or human rights non-governmental organizations (NGOs). According to national human rights NGOs, even when such vulnerable individuals are referred, the authorities at Petrou Ralli may not register their applications.

Amnesty International representatives visited the Petrou Ralli building on 6 July, and on the first two Fridays and Saturdays of October 2012, and saw that the situation remains the same since the visits conducted with other non-governmental organizations and human rights groups in the winter and spring of 2012. On each visit, a large queue of asylum-seekers of different nationalities, including individuals from Iran and Syria, awaited outside the building to lodge and asylum application.

During the July visit, an Iranian asylum-seeker spoke to the organization about his despair while waiting and that he did not dare to go and get food and drink because of his fear of losing his place. He appeared weak and looked ready to faint from the lack of food and water. Others spoke about their repeated attempts to lodge an application and their despair about the waiting conditions. During the 7 October visit, representatives saw approximately 140 individuals, including minors and Syrian nationals that had fled the conflict in their country. Most of them were scared about being arrested during the frequent police sweep operations in Athens and/or being attacked by members of extreme right groups. They spoke of other asylum-seekers who did not come to file an asylum application because of that fear. An asylum-seeker from Syria told the organization on 12 October how he had been trying to lodge an application for five weeks without success, and he knew many people who had just given up

trying. During October once more only around 20 asylum-seekers managed to get their applications registered each Saturday.

The situation outside the Attika Aliens' Police Directorate has been extensively monitored by national human rights NGOs and Amnesty International through vigils conducted outside the Petrou Ralli building between February and April 2012 every Friday night and the early hours of Saturday morning. A detailed report entitled *The Campaign for Access to Asylum in the Attika Area*, published on 8 October 2012, presents the findings of the vigils. It lists the appalling waiting conditions, the authorities' practice of receiving only a very small number of asylum applications, and the lack of care for unaccompanied minors who attempt to apply for asylum. The report is signed by 14 national associations, entities, groups and NGOs working for the rights of migrants and refugees, including the Greek Council of Refugees, AITIMA, the Ecumenical Refugee Programme, the Group of Lawyers for the Rights of Migrants and Refugees, Arsis and the Greek Helsinki Monitor. The report also presents the national and international and EU legal framework that Greek authorities violate with this continuing practice.

The asylum-seekers clearly face severe difficulties in successfully filing their applications in Attika, but those unable to apply for asylum are increasingly at risk of detention and/or deportation in view of the mass police crackdowns on migrants that took place in Athens in August and in the first week of October. The organization has monitored several cases of asylum-seekers arrested during those operations. In two such cases, the asylum seekers were only able to register their applications after two months in detention and following interventions by Amnesty International and the Greek Council of Refugees.

Another detained asylum-seeker reported that the appalling conditions coupled with the police authorities telling him openly that if he applied for asylum while being held, he would be detained further, acted as a deterrent.

The organization is profoundly concerned about a provision on the draft presidential decree on asylum determination procedures that would extend the maximum period of detention for those asylum-seekers who apply for asylum while in detention from six to 12 months. The threat of a year's detention, particularly in view of the poor detention conditions, will act as a further deterrent for those asylums-seekers wishing to apply for international protection while in detention.

Despite legislation in 2011 establishing an Asylum Authority with no police involvement, this Authority is not anticipated to start work before March 2013.

Notes:

For some of Amnesty International's concerns on Greece, see the following documents:
[Greece must halt police crackdown on irregular migrants](#), Press release, 8 August 2012
[Greece plans sweep of migrants and asylum-seekers](#), Press release, 2 April 2012
[Limited and inhumane: Access to asylum in Greece is degrading and uncertain](#), Refugee Network, Greek Section, Amnesty International
[Greece: A year on since the M.S.S. judgement: Greece continues to violate asylum-seekers' human rights](#), EUR 25/002/2012, 26 January 2012
[The Dublin II Trap: Transfers of Asylum-Seekers to Greece](#), EUR 25/001/2010
[The Campaign for the Access to Asylum in Attika Area](#) report. The report was signed by 14 NGOs, associations, entities and groups. The signatories are: AITIMA; Arsis; Support Committee for Refugees in Chios "Lathra"; Network for the Rights of the Child; Ecumenical Refugee Programme; Network for the Social Support of Migrants and Refugees; Group of Lawyers for the Rights of Refugees and Migrants; Greek Helsinki Monitor; Association of United Afghans in Greece; Greek Council of Refugees; Greek Refugees' Forum; Medical Intervention; Movement for Human Rights – Solidarity for Refugees- Samos.

End/