

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

AI Index:
News Service No:
12 June 2007

EUR 25/006/2007 (Public)
105

Greece: Bringing traffickers to justice must not be at the expense of the rights of their victims

Trafficking for forced prostitution in Greece is believed to have increased tenfold from 1990 until 1997. However, the government has not yet provided sufficient measures to protect and support trafficked women and girls, Amnesty International said today.

The organization's report, *Greece: Uphold the rights of women and girls trafficked for sexual exploitation*, reveals that women and girls, mainly from eastern Europe and Africa, have been brought into Greece in large numbers only to find themselves forced into prostitution. In the process, their rights to liberty and security, to freedom from torture or other ill-treatment, and to redress and reparation are being violated. Women and girls are exposed to a series of human rights abuses not only at the hands of traffickers but also to subsequent violations in the criminal justice system. The report points to gaps in Greek law and practice on trafficking that undermine the efforts to help trafficked women and girls.

"In the face of this modern form of slavery, continued protection for trafficked women is made conditional on their willingness to testify in court against their traffickers. Some are silenced by threats of reprisals from their traffickers. As a result, traffickers escape justice while their victims do not get assistance," said Nicola Duckworth, Europe and Central Asia Programme Director at Amnesty International.

"An effective witness protection programme is not on offer, nor is relocation to another country where trafficked women might escape reprisals."

Aleksa comes from eastern Europe. She was taken to Greece and forced into prostitution. She was detained by the Greek authorities because she did not have the necessary documents. Aleksa was offered protection by the Greek authorities only if she cooperated in bringing her traffickers to trial. Now she dreads testifying against them in court because the police protection she is offered is not adequate and she is afraid her attackers or their associates will come after her.

According to non-governmental organizations (NGOs), in 2000 alone, up to 90,000 people are believed to have been trafficked into Greece from central and eastern Europe, a large number of whom were women trafficked for prostitution.

Governments are obliged to prevent, investigate and prosecute trafficking and to ensure protection to those who have been subjected to it. Although the Greek government has

introduced a series of new laws since 2002, it has failed to correctly identify most trafficked women and only a few have received limited protection or other assistance.

Trafficking is a clandestine activity and the vast majority of trafficked women remain hidden. The first crucial step for trafficked women to get assistance and protection is to be identified as a "victim of trafficking". Otherwise, they can, for example, be detained and prosecuted for unlicensed prostitution or illegal entry, and be deported only to be trafficked yet again. However, police are poorly trained to identify trafficked women, especially outside the big cities, while the women are afraid to come forward. According to official statistics, between 100 and 200 women and children are identified each year as having been trafficked. Local NGOs estimate the number of trafficked women and girls that remain unidentified each year to be in the thousands.

The second step to assistance and protection is the willingness of trafficked women to testify against their traffickers and this is the only way open to the majority of victims who come from countries outside the European Union. Victims of trafficking have to decide in just 30 days whether they will cooperate with police in exposing the traffickers. In exchange for such cooperation they receive short-term residence permits and further assistance and protection. However, in some cases, women are afraid to testify for fear of reprisals and they face deportation. The future of trafficked women whose traffickers are not being pursued and whose cooperation is not being requested remains unclear.

"The system of 'cooperation in exchange for protection' is deeply flawed. It undermines the rights of women to assistance and protection irrespective of whether they cooperate or not," Nicola Duckworth said.

"Women are trapped between fear of reprisal against themselves or their families from the traffickers, and the pressure from police for cooperation. Bringing traffickers to justice should not be at the expense of the protection of the rights of the trafficked women."

See:

Greece: Uphold the rights of women and girls trafficked for sexual exploitation (AI Index: EUR 25/002/2007) <http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/eng/eur250022007>