

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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Greece: Amnesty International condemns forced evictions in Patras

Amnesty International is calling on the Greek government to ensure that around 100 people who became homeless after being forcibly evicted from their makeshift homes in Patras on 12 July 2009 are provided with immediate emergency relief, including shelter, water and access to medical assistance. The government should also ensure that all victims of the forced eviction are guaranteed the right to an effective remedy and receive adequate alternative accommodation and compensation.

In the context of its long standing concerns that the treatment of irregular migrants, asylum-seekers and refugees in Greece violates international standards, Amnesty International is also urging the authorities to provide access to fair and satisfactory asylum procedures to the individuals evicted from the campsite and those arrested during and following the operation who wish to apply for asylum including full procedural safeguards.

Amnesty International also calls the authorities to ensure that the deportation procedures initiated against the irregular migrants arrested during and following the eviction operation are in accordance with due process of law and include procedural safeguards, including the ability to challenge individually the decision to deport; access to competent interpretation services and legal counsel; and access to a review, ideally a judicial review, of a negative decision.

The campsite in Patras has been occupied for some 13 years, most recently by approximately 300 people of Afghani origin including asylum-seekers and irregular migrants. A significant number of these individuals were minors, many of whom were unaccompanied. In breach of international law, people were forcibly evicted from their homes without adequate notice, any prior consultation with the community, due process of law including access to legal remedies, and provision of adequate alternative accommodation for many of those who were evicted. Forced evictions violate a range of international and regional human rights standards to which Greece is a party, including the right to adequate housing. Evictions may only be carried out as a last resort, once all other feasible alternatives have been explored, and only when all appropriate procedural protections are in place. All persons, irrespective of their legal status, must be guaranteed protection against forced evictions.

The afternoon before the evictions officers from the Patras police force are said to have orally informed some of the individuals living at the campsite that their homes would be demolished the following day, but no official notice of the order was given. The makeshift dwellings were demolished from 5.30am on 12 July in an operation carried out by the county administration, the planning authorities and the police. According to reports many people were not provided with adequate time to remove all their belongings and that day the authorities also refused to show the order of demolition to lawyers representing a non-governmental organization working for the rights of refugees and migrants in the city of Patras. Thus, many people lost their belongings as a result of the demolition and also of a fire that broke out during the demolition.

Around 200 people were present at the time of the evictions, as some of those affected including unaccompanied minors were said to have left the campsite the night before.

According to information from the Achaia Police Directorate, in the context of the demolition operation conducted on 12 July 2009, the police documented 45 unaccompanied minors of Afghani origin who were later sent to the special reception centre for minors in the town of Konitsa. Seventeen more minors of Afghani origin subsequently presented themselves at the Patras police station in the days following the eviction, and will be transferred to minors' reception centres in the north of Greece;

The Police Directorate also documented several asylum-seekers of Afghani origin holding documentation proving they had applied for asylum. This number included 23 people who stated that they were homeless and who were subsequently provided with accommodation in local hotels; 15 people of Afghani origin with no papers who were arrested and detained as irregular migrants; and 14 more migrants from various African countries with no papers who were arrested and detained during the same day in different police operations. For all of those arrested, deportation procedures have been initiated.

Currently, however, there are reported to be some 80 to 100 individuals evicted from the campsite who are homeless and living in fields close to Patras without shelter or access to water, sanitation and medical assistance. Among those left unprotected are said to be a small number of unaccompanied minors. Under international human rights standards, Greece is obligated to ensure that evictions do not result in individuals becoming homeless or vulnerable to violations of other human rights.

Early last year, Amnesty International had expressed concern over the welfare of a large number of individuals then living at the Patras campsite when they were threatened with eviction following a decision by the planning authorities to demolish their makeshift homes in December 2007. The evictions did not take place at that time as the planning authorities accepted an appeal lodged against the order of demolition.

The current operation comes against the backdrop of a series of moves by the Greek police across the country in the past few months which have seen many irregular migrants arrested, detained and deported back to their countries of origin. In recent months the Patras police have reportedly carried out three such operations at the site where the demolition took place, arresting between 40 and 50 people each time. As a result the number of those living at the site is said to have fallen from a rough estimate of 500 people in May this year to the 300 individuals said to have been living there prior to the evictions.

Amnesty International is requesting additional information on the eviction from the Greek government including on what measures the government will take to ensure that all those who were forcibly evicted are guaranteed their right to an effective remedy, including adequate alternative accommodation and compensation for all losses. Amnesty International is also urging the Greek authorities to ensure that the reported 80 to 100 people left without shelter are provided with emergency relief, including shelter, access to water and medical assistance. Specific measures should be taken to identify and protect the unaccompanied minors said to be among this number.

Furthermore, Amnesty International reiterates its position that the Greek authorities should only ever detain migrants as a measure of last resort, after justifying in each individual case that it is a necessary and proportionate measure that conforms with international law. Alternative non-custodial measures should be the preferred solution and should always be considered before resorting to detention. Recognized refugees and migrants with a regular status should never have their rights to liberty or freedom of movement restricted for immigration purposes.

For further information about Amnesty International's concerns about the asylum system and the treatment of asylum seekers and migrants in Greece see:

[Greece: Proposed changes to asylum procedures flagrantly violate international law](#), AI Index: EUR 25/005/2009

[Greece: Amnesty International reiterates its serious concerns about detention conditions for asylum-seekers following ruling of the European Court of Human Rights](#), AI Index: EUR
25/006/2009

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