

Amnesty International

Public Statement

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Greece: Further forced evictions leave large numbers homeless

Amnesty International is again calling on the Greek authorities to ensure that individuals made homeless following forced evictions are provided with suitable alternative accommodation, in line with the country's international obligations.

According to reports, the latest incident started early in the morning of 20 July 2009 and was completed on 21 July 2009. The Greek police evicted around 100 individuals who had been living in the Old Appeal Court of Athens. No alternative accommodation was reportedly provided to those living in the disused courthouse either before or after the eviction. There are also reports that the remaining migrants living at the courthouse did not receive appropriate notification of the impending eviction by the police.

Around 600 persons, including irregular migrants and potentially asylum-seekers, had lived for the last three years in the disused courthouse in Sokratous street in squalid conditions with no water, electricity or proper sanitation. Over the past two months the Greek authorities had been making attempts to evict them from the building. The 600 inhabitants had refused to move, claiming they had no alternative accommodation. At the time of their eviction the number of those remaining there had been reduced to around 100 people, following a series of sweep operations by the police in the centre of Athens which led to many of those living in the courthouse being arrested for having no proof of their legal right to remain in Greece.

According to reports the police arrested only a few of those evicted, as most had left the building the night before and dispersed around the centre of Athens. Fears have been expressed by local non-governmental organisations that many of those evicted were subsequently arrested in sweep operations conducted by the police in the centre of Athens on 20 and 21 July and that those with no documents confirming their legal right to stay are likely to be detained and deported.

On 9 May 2009, five migrants were injured after members of a far-right group tried to storm the courthouse. Some human rights activists were also lightly injured during the attack. There were reports that although the police were present, they did not take action to prevent the attacks or protect those under the attack.

These events follow the eviction of around 300 migrants and asylum-seekers from their makeshift homes in Patras on 12 July 2009. At that time Amnesty International expressed concern that around 100 individuals were left homeless as a result, living in fields close to Patras without shelter, or access to water, sanitation and medical assistance. Among those left unprotected were said to be a small number of unaccompanied minors.

International law prohibits forced evictions. No one should be evicted without adequate notice, prior consultation, due process of law including access to legal remedies, and provision of adequate alternative accommodation. Forced evictions violate a range of international and regional

human rights treaties and standards, which protect the right to adequate housing, most notably the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, to which Greece is a party.

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.

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

Greece: Amnesty International condemns forced evictions in Patras, AI Index: EUR 25/007/2009

Through the Demand Dignity campaign, launched in May 2009, Amnesty International is calling on governments globally to take all necessary measures, including the adoption of laws and policies that comply with international human rights law, to prohibit and prevent forced evictions.

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