



Cairo Institute
for Human Rights Studies
Institut du Caire pour les études des droits de l'homme
مركز القاهرة لدراسات حقوق الإنسان



THE OBSERVATORY
for the Protection of
Human Rights Defenders
OMCT
SOS-Torture Network
fidh

Re: Request from international human rights organizations to drop the case (16767 – 2022) against human rights defender Doros Polykarpou

12 December 2024

Dear Attorney General Georgios L. Savvides,

We, the undersigned international human rights organizations, are writing to express our grave concern regarding the ongoing criminal case (case number 16767 – 2022) against Doros Polykarpou, a prominent human rights defender and co-founder of KISA - Action for Equality, Support, Anti-Racism, which is one of Cyprus's leading non-governmental organizations defending the rights of migrants, refugees, and victims of human trafficking.

Doros Polykarpou is facing charges of misdemeanour acts of “trespassing”, “disturbance of peace”, “insult” and assaulting two security guards at the Pournara First Reception Centre during a visit on 12 March 2022. If convicted, he could face up to three years in prison. We are calling for the charges against him to be dropped as they appear to be unfounded and linked to his human rights work.

The initial hearing, scheduled for 15 October 2024 has been postponed to 11 February 2025, due to the prosecution's failure to provide the defence with video footage presented as evidence to the case file by the prosecutor's office, despite Mr. Polykarpou's lawyer having already requested access to this video footage in April 2024. This was the third hearing postponement since Mr. Polykarpou was first summoned in August 2022.

We would like to use this opportunity to bring to your attention the details of this case – as they emerge from Polykarpou's own defence and the account of Ms Espuche (coordinator of the European network Migreurop) and an eye witness on the day – as well as other contextual elements relating to the attacks and other challenges faced by Mr Polykarpou and by KISA, which are of relevance to this matter. We request that you take these elements into consideration in your review of the case and call on you to exercise your constitutional power and suspend the prosecution of the case against Mr Polykarpou. We also urge you to take into account that Mr Polykarpou's presence in the unofficial part of the camp was solely linked with his routine human rights work.

The incident which led to the prosecution of Mr. Polykarpou took place at the Pournara First Reception Centre on 12 March 2022, during which Mr. Polykarpou was accompanied by Ms. Brigitte Espuche. The incident involved the actions of two private security guards of the Centre. According to Mr Polykarpou, one of the guards had slapped him on the back asking if he remembered him and then subjected him to a physical and verbal attack despite Mr Polykarpou's warnings asking him to refrain from this conduct. In her witness statement, Ms Espuche also described how Mr Polykarpou was violently pushed several times by the same guard. Shortly after, Mr Polykarpou and Ms Espuche were taken by the guards to a police post near to the camp's exit. There, Mr Polykarpou stated that he would like to file a complaint against the guards. He was told by a police officer to wait in the office. After approximately twenty minutes, police told them to file a complaint at the Kokkinotrimithia police station. According to Mr Polykarpou, by asking them to wait, the police

attempted to stall and delay their complaint, so as to allow the two security guards to file their complaint first.

Doros Polykarpou filed a complaint against the security guard at the local police station on the same day, 12 March 2022, but the complaint was archived by the prosecutor.

Additionally, Ms. Espuche, who was present at the events, has submitted her written testimony to your department dated 14 March 2022, which was subsequently referred to the Chief of Police by your office on 6 May 2022. However, she was never asked to give her statement, and neither she nor several staff of the centre nor the asylum seekers present at the time of the event are listed as witnesses in Doros Polykarpou's case. All witnesses listed in the indictment are either police officers, the security guards stationed at the reception centre or the staff of the Asylum Service.

It is worth noting that the security guard who encountered Doros Polykarpou at the Centre was the same security guard against whom KISA has filed a complaint in relation to a case where two women asylum-seekers reported that the guard had used excessive force against them at the entrance of the Social Welfare Services in Lakatamia. According to Mr Polykarpou, the guard's violent behaviour against him was an act of retaliation in response to an official complaint filed by KISA to the national police complaint mechanism regarding the handling of the two asylum-seekers' complaint.

It must also be noted that in January 2024, the office of KISA was targeted in a bombing attack, resulting in significant damage to property and archives. KISA reports that this attack did not happen in a vacuum but followed years of threats to the organization, including online and via email, by individuals linked to anti-immigration and nationalist groups. Despite this alarming incident, Cypriot authorities have not publicly condemned the attack, nor has there been any progress in the criminal investigation into it. EU Commissioner for Home Affairs, Ylva Johansson raised similar concerns with the authorities during her visit to the country that same month. Furthermore, none of the complaints filed by Doros Polykarpou against the individuals who threatened him were handled effectively.

In February 2024, the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders Mary Lawlor sent an [official communication](#) to the government of Cyprus expressing serious concern for the safety of KISA's staff and underlining their worry and dismay at the alleged failure of the authorities to speak out in support of the human rights defenders in the aftermath of the attack. As recently as October 2024, the trial of Mr Polykarpou in this case was [raised](#) at the European Parliament by MEP Erik Marquardt highlighting concerns about the potentially political motivation behind it and an unfair trial.

We are very concerned that the prosecution of Mr Polykarpou appears to have failed to include crucial evidence that would support the accused's version of the events, undermining his right to a fair trial.

In May 2024 Front Line Defenders, which chairs ProtectDefenders.eu, the European Union mechanism for human rights defenders at risk, recognized the work of Doros Polykarpou and KISA by honouring him with the [2024 Award for Human Rights Defenders at Risk](#).

We believe that the criminal procedure against Mr Polykarpou, in relation to the events of March 2022, is linked to his human rights work helping migrants, refugees and victims of trafficking. As such, we believe that it is inconsistent with international human rights law and standards, including the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.

We, the undersigned international human rights organizations urge you to dismiss the charges against Doros Polykarpou and drop the case against him.

Additionally, we call on the Cypriot authorities to:

- Investigate the claims made by Doros Polykarpou against the security guard of the Pournara Reception Centre and ensure that all relevant witnesses, including Brigitte Espuche from Migreurop, are allowed to testify;
- Prevent and investigate any further physical and verbal threats, including through social media, against KISA and its former director Doros Polykarpou;
- Guarantee that all human rights defenders can carry out their activities in Cyprus without fear of reprisals and free from undue restrictions, in line with Cyprus' national, regional and international human rights obligations and commitments.

We remain at your disposal should you wish to discuss this case in more detail, and we look forward to your response.

Kind regards,

Amnesty International

Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS)

European Network Against Racism (ENAR)

EuroMed Rights

Front Line Defenders

International Partnership for Human Rights (IPHR)

International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), within the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders

La Strada International - European NGO Platform against Trafficking in Human Beings

Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants (PICUM)

World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), within the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders