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GREEK NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR HUMAN RIGHTS
Oral Statement to the United Nations Human Rights Committee

NHRI report on Greece's 2nd periodic report under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)

19 October 2015

Members of the Human Rights Committee,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Greek National Commission for Human Rights, I would like to thank you for this opportunity to present the views of the Greek National Commission on the occasion of the 2nd periodic report of Greece under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. My name is Maria Gavouneli and I am the Chair of the GNCHR Sub-Committee on International Relations. Two are the major problems facing Greece and consequently the GNCHR at this point in time:

- The unprecedented influx of migrants and asylum seekers in the country, especially during the past few months, and
- The continued impact of the economic crisis and austerity measures on the full enjoyment of human rights

As to the first issue: more than a quarter of a million people arrived mostly at the Greek islands since the beginning of the year, more than 150.000 people in the two summer months of July and August alone. Drastic action in the past weeks has helped to manage the influx and we welcome the recent visit of the High Commissioner for Refugees in Lesbos with a view to have a first hand experience of the situation there. It is clear, however, that the sheer numbers involved clearly exceed the capacity of the system to deal with the problem. However, the problem is not simply a question of financial resources and personnel: The GNCHR has recently, on 31 August 2015, called the European Union to urgently assume its responsibilities and redesign its asylum policy so that along with the UN may act in a consistent and effective manner in order to show its human face and indeed safeguard the values and principles common to us all and has attached itself to the Open Letter addressed by Professor Alan Miller, President of the European Network of National Human Rights Institutions (ENNHRI) to the European Council on 10 September 2015. The GNCHR has also expressed on 20 April 2015 its deep concern regarding the recurring sea tragedies and the loss of human lives in the Mediterranean and it has contributed to the drafting of the ENNHRI Statement on the continuing tragedies in the Mediterranean Sea, a human rights approach (April 2015).

On the second issue: The GNCHR remains extremely concerned with the deleterious impact the continued economic crisis and austerity measures have on the full enjoyment of human rights in the country. To that effect, it issued on 15 July 2015 a Statement on the impact of the continuing austerity measures on human rights. The new element in this Statement, that follows a number of other Statements on the same issue, relates to the proposal for a Human Rights Impact Assessment, an instrument for the protection of human rights in times of financial crisis. We are currently working on implementing our proposal, which we consider to be a crucial and useful tool for the protection of human rights in the country.

A final word for the Greek National Commission for Human Rights: Like all institutions in times of crisis, we continually strive for the increase of its human and material resources. Even under the present conditions, however, we manage to produce high-quality work and increase our visibility, especially in view of the difficult issue we have to face. In addition to the excellent work by our staff, I would like to pay tribute to the personal contributions of the members of the GNCHR.

I remain naturally at your disposal for further questions and queries,

Maria Gavouneli