

“We know we are blacks but we are not animals!”¹

Joint Press Release – Presentation of report comprising findings of campaign on access to asylum (asylum-campaign.blogspot.gr)

We, the associations, entities, groups and NGOs signing this report, **visited the building of Attica Aliens Directorate at Petrou Ralli street every Friday evening until the dawn from Saturday 17 February 2012 to 7 April 2012²**. Our purpose was to register, document and denounce the **unacceptable practice by Greek authorities of refusing to receive and register asylum applications**. This practice has continued until this day, while the entry into force of the infamous new Asylum Service, originally due to start operating in January 2012, has been deferred once more until March 2013.

Our findings and conclusions were recorded in the report entitled **“Campaign on access to asylum in Attica”**, which comprises also all pertinent information about access to asylum in Greece and documents the relevant violations of international, European and domestic law by the Greek authorities.

The police authorities - following their usual practice of recent years - refuse to register asylum applications and only agree to receive an extraordinarily small number of asylum applications and only every Saturday at dawn. **Hundreds of people** are subjected to the ordeal of **waiting** at the end of one street for two to three days and nights in a row, under **appalling conditions**, without access to a toilet, water or food, so as to MAYBE have a small chance of having their asylum application registered. At the same time the police authorities aim through **inhuman and degrading practices to discourage the submission of asylum applications** and to bar access even to the most vulnerable categories, like single women and unaccompanied minors. In particular:

- Between Thursday evening and Friday morning, the police authorities often disperse and chase away asylum seekers en masse, even with **the use of violence** (globs), as a result of which many asylum seekers stop trying. We received allegations even about the use of chemicals (teargas) in order to drive away the asylum seekers.
- **Women** are pushed back from the head of the queue³, while at the same time being exposed to the same appalling conditions. They are forced to stay day and night within a large crowd consisting overwhelmingly of men, without the slightest concern for their situation.
- **There is no care whatsoever for unaccompanied minors⁴**, who are exposed to very bad weather conditions and are forced to wait in the same queue with adults. As a revealing example, we mention here the **arbitrary** removal of Afghani minors by the responsible officials under the pretext that in his estimation they appeared to be either adults or Pakistani! A minor also who was waiting for days in the queue denounced the refusal of a police guard to let him bring water and food to other persons waiting and his order to either throw them away or return them to the store.

¹ Cry of an African man who tried over several months to lodge an asylum application at Petrou Ralli street.

² Day on which the police authorities have arbitrarily decided to receive asylum applications

³ Out of the over 20 women who came over the past 4 weeks of the asylum campaign, only very few succeeded in entering the Aliens Directorate, in order to have their asylum application registered.

⁴ During our overall presence we registered approximately 10 cases.

This practice by the authorities entails **grave violations** of international, EU and domestic law concerning access to asylum and fundamental rights of persons seeking international protection. In particular it constitutes **a breach of:**

- The right to seek asylum and make an asylum application;
- The principle of non-refoulement;
- The right of every human being to safety and liberty;
- The right to human dignity and the right of every human being not to be subjected to inhuman and degrading treatment,

while it also deprives these people from **their rights as asylum seekers**.

The refusal of the authorities to register asylum applications and the treatment awaiting asylum seekers, which violates any notion of human dignity, do not constitute new practices nor are they a result of errors or the economic crisis. On the contrary, they belong to a **systematic long-standing policy with the clear and deliberate purpose to discourage the submission of asylum applications in Greece**.

It forms also part of the **wider policy of Greek authorities** towards refugees and migrants, which is characterized by their **targeting and the promotion of racist speech and practices**, as reflected by: massive arrests of aliens, arbitrary detention with a view to deportation, expulsion of persons who are in danger in their countries of origins, overnight conduct of asylum interviews, **the lack of reception facilities**, the prolonged detention under inhuman conditions and so on. These practices have been repeatedly denounced by organizations and entities in Greece and abroad and have led to repeated convictions of Greece by international organizations.

WE CONTINUE TO MANIFEST OUR SOLIDARITY, to those who had to leave their home countries, because their lives, freedom or dignity were in danger because of State oppression, war or poverty.

WE CONTINUE TO DEMAND:

- Unobstructed access to asylum, every day and without mediators.
- Asylum and social protection to persons who are entitled to international protection and an end to the unacceptable situation that has been imposed by the authorities, on a daily basis as well as every Saturday morning at Petrou Ralli.
- The fulfillment of the Government's legal commitment to strip police authorities of their responsibility for asylum issues and allocate responsibility **for all asylum applications** to the Asylum Service.

Athens, 6 October 2012

Aitima

**Solidarity Group for Refugees in Chios,
"Lathra"**

Arsis

Medical Intervention

Network for the Rights of the Child

**Integration Centre for Working Migrants –
Ecumenical Refugee Program**

**Network for Social Support of Migrants and
Refugees**

**Group of Lawyers for the Rights of
Migrants and Refugees**

Greek Helsinki Monitor

Association of Afghans United in Greece

Greek Council for Refugees

Association for the Care of Minors

Greek Forum for Refugees