



Oral Statement to United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD)

This oral briefing was presented before the United Nations' Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) regarding Greece's combined twentieth and twenty-first periodic report on the implementation of the International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination, during the Committee's 90th Session, on August the 3rd 2016 in Geneva.

Médecins du Monde – Greece welcomes the opportunity to participate in the proceedings before the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination regarding Greece's compliance with its obligations under the International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination (hereinafter ICERD).

The examination of the Greece's Report on the implementation of the ICERD comes at a time when our country is entering the seventh year of a severe financial crisis. This, in conjunction with the so called refugee/migration crisis over the past year has in our view contributed to further discrimination of the most vulnerable groups, such as migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, Roma, and LGBT communities.

Doctors of the World – Greece, since the beginning of its operations in the early 90s, has been implementing several projects in order to provide medical as well as psychosocial services to marginalized populations that cannot access healthcare services and medical care. No wonder that MdM over the past year has been present and active, offering its services to help ease this new humanitarian crisis, and continues to provide healthcare services and psychosocial support to Third-Country Nationals (TCNs) arriving in Greece.

Ladies and gentlemen, members of the Committee, it is no secret that the already the overwhelmed and poor on resources Greek asylum and reception system has further deteriorated as a consequence of the exceptional number of arrivals in Greece and of the closure of borders with northern neighboring countries.

Since the migration agreement between the EU and Turkey went into effect, the vast majority of asylum seekers and migrants that arrived on the Greek islands have been restricted to the islands, often held in the "hotspots", in places where they were designed for transit and not for long term periods of stay. Asylum seekers who arrived before March 20 and those admitted to the Greek asylum system following admissibility interviews

conducted on the Greek islands are living either in poor reception facilities in continental Greece or in other substandard informal sites and facilities.

Of course Greece has its own share of responsibility for these poor reception and detention conditions. However, Greece is not the only one to blame, since it is merely enforcing what was already decided on EU level regarding the management of the so-called refugee/migration crisis

Indeed, the fact that migrants and refugees would be subject to substandard conditions in Greece was clear before the EU Turkey deal trapped them in our country. So we feel that Greece's failure to protect the displaced is actually a predictable outcome on EU migration Policy.

Thus we strongly believe that continued attention and sustained pressure on the Greek government and the EU by the UN and other rights bodies are crucial to ensure the needed change in migration and asylum policy and practice so that the rights of migrants and asylum seekers are fully respected according to international standards.

However, in doing so, the government should strike a fair balance between the aid and assistance provided for migrants and asylum seekers and the rest of the vulnerable groups, that have been affected over the past years by the financial crisis. We must avoid at any cost turning poor against the poor because this will only lead to more xenophobia and racism.

In recent years, Greece has seen an alarming surge in xenophobic attacks on migrants and asylum seekers. Right from the start we, as MdM Greece have implemented several projects to raise awareness and inform the public about the pernicious repercussions of racism and the need to combat racist crimes and to provide the necessary support to victims of hate crimes¹.

The Greek government has taken some positive steps in the past four years, including establishing specialized police units and offices within the police to tackle racist violence and appointing a special hate crimes prosecutor in Athens and Thessaloniki. The government also introduced measures granting humanitarian visas to undocumented victims and witnesses of certain crimes, including hate crimes. A 2014 anti-racism law increased minimum penalties for hate crimes and improved the scope and application of racist motivation as an aggravating circumstance. The proceedings against Golden Dawn party members have also contributed to the marginalization of the far right extremists in public sphere.

However, the problem remains. Far-right extremism and anti-immigrant voices remain present in the background and always waiting for the opportunity to come out in the open. A typical example of this is the reported attacks against asylum seekers, migrants, and international aid workers on Leros Island a few weeks ago.

Thus, concrete steps to promote better understanding between local communities and the displaced and effective strategy to improve state response to racist violence, and address

¹ i.e. Projects [“ENOUGH! – APKETA!”](#) and [“Support and legal services for victims of hate crime ”](#)

racism and xenophobia particularly in the context of the refugee crisis is needed and the Committee should encourage the Government in doing so.

Closing this brief oral briefing, we would like to thank you once more for the opportunity to contribute to the work of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. We can assure you that, MdM-Greece will continue to work closely with the government and the national/international human rights bodies against racism and xenophobia and provide to every person in need health care services and support, regardless of the status and without any discrimination.

* * *

About Médecins du Monde – Doctors of the World Greece

*Médecins du Monde-Doctors of the World Greece was founded in 1990 and is part of the International network of MdM that consists of 15 Chapters in the world (Argentina, Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, Greece, Japan, Luxemburg, Netherlands Portugal, Spain, Sweden , Switzerland, United Kingdom and U.S.A.) **It remains, though, a Greek organization**, taking its own path based on circumstances particular to Greece, while maintaining financial and administrative independence and transparency shared with the network.*

Completing 26 consecutive years of action in 2016, MdM-Greece has been acknowledged as a credible and efficient organization that fosters the sense of solidarity within the Greek Community.

Having conducted numerous humanitarian aid programs in Greece and in developing countries, Greek doctors, administration, medical staff and technical experts continue to offer their voluntary services.

MdM-Greece with more than 600 volunteers since its foundation, in around 50 countries around the world, contributes to medical and humanitarian aid programs. *Throughout the years, medical and humanitarian aid programs have been carried out in Iraq, Lebanon, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Serbia, Sudan, Palestine, Haiti, Gaza, Uganda, Tanzania, Algeria etc.*

Doctors of the World Greece works with other international Non Governmental Organizations in order to more efficiently provide humanitarian aid to people in need.

* * *