

Press Release

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Cyprus: Commissioner Hammarberg recommends more efforts on migrants and trafficking

Strasbourg, 11.12.2008 – “Encouraging steps have been undertaken, but more efforts are needed to handle migration issues and combat trafficking in human beings” said today in Nicosia Thomas Hammarberg handing over his [report](#) on a visit to the Republic of Cyprus to the Minister of Justice and Public Order, Dr. Kypros Chrysostomides.

While acknowledging the authorities’ efforts to enhance the asylum service, the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights observes that “these measures alone will not suffice to treat asylum-seekers’ and refugees’ demands in an effective and speedy manner. Practical cooperation to handle the influx via the Green Line is also needed” he said. Moreover, the Commissioner underlines that it is “vital that asylum-seekers are properly informed about their rights, including employment rights, welfare assistance, health care and education. The authorities should also adopt a new legislation to grant free legal aid to asylum-seekers.”

Commissioner Hammarberg is equally concerned about migrants awaiting deportation and the conditions and length of detention of rejected asylum-seekers. “Their number and the time they must spend in detention should be kept to a strict minimum” he said. “It is also essential to further efforts to improve conditions of detention, ensure access to judicial review of deportation and detention decisions, grant detainees better access to information and education activities and guarantee that they can regularly receive visitors.”

On trafficking in human beings, Commissioner Hammarberg notes with appreciation the legislative and administrative measures taken to combat the phenomenon and to support the victims. On the other hand, he deplores that the so-called cabaret “artiste” work permit was still in place at the time of the visit, making it more difficult to combat effectively this new form of slavery. “The authorities must urgently abolish this work permit and ensure that no other scheme could be used for the same unlawful purpose” he said.

Finally, the Commissioner urges the authorities to strengthen their efforts to combat domestic violence and welcomes both the creation of a Commissioner for children’s rights and measures envisaged to solve the problem of overcrowded prisons.

The report, published together with the Government’s comments, is based on a visit the Commissioner carried out in July 2008 when he met with high-level state officials of the Republic of Cyprus and crossed the Green Line to hold talks with representatives of the Turkish Cypriot Community.

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