



PERMANENT MISSION OF GREECE
GENEVA

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NOTE VERBALE

The Permanent Mission of Greece to the United Nations Office at Geneva and other International Organizations in Switzerland presents its compliments to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and, with reference to the “Joint urgent appeal from Special Procedures” transmitted by the latter on 8 February 2016 (Ref: UA, GRC 1/2016), has the honour to attach herewith the reply of the Secretary General of Welfare /Ministry of Labour, Social Security and Social Solidarity.

The Permanent Mission of Greece to the United Nations Office at Geneva and other International Organizations in Switzerland avails itself of this opportunity to renew to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights the assurances of its highest consideration.



Geneva, 23 May 2016

To: The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
Mr. Karim Ghezraoui
Chief a.i.
Special Procedures Branch
registry@ohchr.org

Att.: 3 pages

ΑΠΟ: ΓΡ. ΑΝ. ΥΠ. ΚΟΙΝ. ΑΣΦΑΛΕΤΥΧΕ

ΑΡ. ΠΡΩ: 2103368210

17 ΜΑΪ. 2016 11:53 P 2



HELLENIC REPUBLIC
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Athens, 13th May 2016

TO**Mr. Jose Guevara**First Vice-Chair
of the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention**Ms. Catalina Devanda Aguilar**Special Rapporteur
on the rights of persons with disabilities**Mr. Dainius Puras**Special Rapporteur
on the right of everyone to the enjoyment to the
highest attainable standard of physical and mental
health**Mr. Juan E. Mendez**Special Rapporteur
on torture And other cruel, inhuman or degrading
treatment or punishment**CC****Ms. Theano Fotiou**Alternate Minister,
Ministry of Labour, Social Security &
Social Solidarity

Honourable Lady and Gentlemen,

Subject : Situation in the Disability Branch of the Centre of Social Welfare of Western Greece

In response to your concern regarding the situation in Lechaina home, the Disability Branch of the Centre of Social Welfare of Western Greece as per your letter UA/GRC 1/2016/08.02.2016 to Ambassador A. Alexandris , Permanent Representative to the UN Office, we would like to inform you the following.

As you already mention, since 2009, national and international organizations have raised justified concerns about the care conditions of the persons with disabilities living in Lechaina.

The present Greek government has taken these concerns seriously and is working towards improving the situation in a manner that will assure that the rights of the people living in Lechaina are fully respected, in line with The EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and Europe 2020 Strategy for Inclusive Growth. The *Alternate Minister of Social Solidarity Ms. Theano Fotiou* has demonstrated her personal interest on the matter through consecutive visits to Lechaina made by herself and her associates.

In order to achieve the goal of eliminating any violations of human rights currently depicted in Lechaina, our Ministry has undertaken a series of measures such as:

1. The placement of two minors in more suitable settings, where their living conditions have significantly improved and their needs are adequately met.
2. Reinforcement of medical staff on a daily basis, in collaboration with the Ministry of Health, through local Hospitals and Health Centers. Despite the restraints deriving from the current financial situation and relevant agreements, our Ministry seeks solutions towards for hiring trained staff for Lechaina and other Centres of Social Welfare.
3. Request for Technical Assistance concerning Child Protection Policies and Deinstitutionalization from the EC Structural Reform Support Services to further secure the process of Deinstitutionalisation (DI).
4. Collaboration with the European Expert Group [EEG on the Transition from Institutional Care to Community-based Care] as well as the European Commission. For instance, all relevant national and international stakeholders will participate in a round table discussion on the reform of child protection services and moving towards community care services for persons with disabilities, which will take place in Athens on *the 18th of May 2016*.
5. Implementation of a pilot DI project in Lechaina in cooperation with Lumos International organization. The project consists of three phases:
 - the first phase, which has already been completed, consisted of research conducted on types of services provided, human resources and the residents of Lechaina.
 - the second phase, expected to begin in June, consists of hiring a small group of trained professional who will complete evaluations of residents and work with the existing staff for a year, in order to establish new working ethics resulting, amongst others, in the abolishment of any means of restraint.
 - the third phase, consists of the implementation of the transition to community-based services and will be examined based on the outcome of the second phase.

A member of our staff has been appointed with the task of overseeing the project in respect to defining, monitoring and evaluating the quality of services throughout the process.

Lastly, the transition from institutional to community-based care has been identified as a key action under the thematic objective "Promoting Social Inclusion and Combating Poverty" for both the European Social Fund (ESF) and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). The Ministry is planning to make use of funding provided through the ESF and the ERDF for a large range of actions, including :

- Establishing a pool of experts on DI, including all stakeholders.
- Re-training and re-qualification of staff who has been working within the institutional culture.
- Activities to expand the scope of foster care, selection and training of foster parents.
- Services supporting applicant-adopters of children with disabilities.
- Motivation and awareness-raising among the stakeholders, by highlighting positive effects of the DI process.
- Focused measures for raising public awareness about the planned activities, including work targeted at changing public attitudes toward children with disabilities.

It is this Ministry's indisputable goal to implement and support a sustainable transition from impersonalized Institutional care to family-based and community-based alternatives for children, persons with disabilities and older persons.

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17 MAI. 2016 11:54 P 4

And of course, our government is open to any possible suggestions on additional measures to protect the physical and mental integrity of persons with disabilities in Lechaina and other state run facilities.

We strongly believe that all our relevant projects will be fully implemented, despite all well known difficulties.

In the meantime, we are at your disposal for any further possible information and clarification.

Yours sincerely,



Dimitris Karellas
Secretary General of Welfare