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Permanent Mission of Greece Geneva

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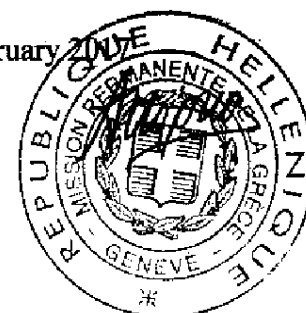
PERMANENT MISSION OF GREECE
TO THE UNITED NATIONS OFFICE & THE OTHER
INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS
GENEVA

Réf. No : 6395/28/AS 383

The Permanent Mission of Greece to the United Nations Office in Geneva and other International Organizations in Switzerland presents its compliments to the Special Procedures Branch of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and with reference to its Communication UA GRC 1/2017 has the honour to transmit attached herewith the reply of the competent Greek Authorities to the joint appeal and the specific questions it posed, sent by four Esteemed Special Rapporteurs to His Excellency the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Hellenic Republic.

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

Geneva, 27th February 2017



Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
Special Procedures Branch, TESPRDD
Attention of Ms Natacha Foucard

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Encl. : 4 pages

1. Please provide any additional information and any comment you may have on the above mentioned allegations.

Greece continues to take measures in order to improve the reception conditions of migrants and asylum seekers in the country. At present, 62 784 people are hosted in facilities with a nominal capacity of 72.945 people. There are approximately 55 camps in the mainland and 5 hotspots and 2 open type centers at Kara Tepe (Lesvos) and Souda (Chios) on the islands. Under the guidance of the Greek Government and with EU funding the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees is presently offering around 18000 places for housing, including apartments, hotels, and guesthouses . Additionally, the coordinating center for migration (KEPOM) in cooperation with the UNHCR have transferred up to 3,500 people to the mainland, since June 2016, mainly consisting of vulnerable persons, in order to decongest the reception facilities on the islands.

2. Please provide information on the measures taken to guarantee the provision of adequate emergency assistance to migrants in Greece, particularly vulnerable to the severe winter conditions, as well as the provisions of alternative adequate housing.

The vast majority of refugees present on the islands are housed in facilities which have heating. They are, therefore, fully protected from severe weather conditions. Cold resistant, "polar" type tents are available for those who do not stay in the above facilities. In this case too, refugees and migrants are not exposed to low temperatures.

Due to the unusually low - for the Greek islands - temperatures that were recorded this winter, problems occurred in Lesvos, where a navy vessel was dispatched in order to temporarily host refugees and migrants and protect them from extreme weather conditions.

a. Samos Reception and Identification Center:

A number of refugees and migrants will soon be transferred either to apartments or to improved housing facilities within the Reception and Identification Center. Many tents are in the process of being replaced by more suitable ones. Work is in progress.

b. Kos Reception and Identification Center:

In late 2016, 340 individuals were staying outside the Center. In January 2017, this number decreased to 150. The latter are either hosted in waterproof tents with sufficient heat or in a building that the military has provided. The UNHCR has also provided support. Works are underway to expand the capacity of the Center.

c) Chios Reception and Identification Center:

All refugees and migrants are housed in the Center in special containers with heating.

d) Lesvos Reception and Identification Center:

The decongestion plan of the Moria Reception and Identification Center is underway (including temporary transfer to apartments and hotel rooms), which will allow for the expansion and upgrading of the Center's facilities. The vast majority of the tents has been replaced by special shelters (tolls), resilient to cold weather. A large quantity of humanitarian aid has been sent to Lesvos (blankets, sleeping-bags, beds and mattresses). As mentioned above, at the peak of winter, the Government dispatched a navy vessel in order to temporarily host refugees and migrants and protect them from extreme weather conditions (400 people were hosted).

. There has been some reluctance on their part of local authorities and hoteliers due to the massive migratory pressure on the island and the significant hit on its tourist industry.

e) Leros Reception and Identification Center: There are no housing problems in Leros. The living conditions of migrants and refugees are satisfactory.

3. Please provide information on measures taken to address the reported outbreaks of influenza and acute respiratory infections, hypothermia and frostbite, and to ensure adequate provision of healthcare to migrants.

The Hellenic Center for Disease Control & Prevention (KEELPNO) of the Ministry of Health has put in place a system of epidemiologic surveillance in migrant/refugee housing facilities across the country, collecting epidemiological data on a daily basis for specific syndromes and health situations, which are important with regard to public health. These data, which are collected by governmental and non governmental agencies operating in the field, are transmitted to KEELPNO daily. The aim of this system is to ensure continuous awareness of the health condition of the refugee/migratory population, which will allow for prompt measures in order to protect public health and prevent the possible transmission of infectious diseases. Even when faced with an isolated incident, guidelines are issued immediately, measures are taken on the ground and recommendations are sent to the relevant authorities. Reports on the epidemiologic data and measures adopted can be found on the site of KEELPNO (www.keelpno.gr).

In the context of the above mentioned system, the "infection of the respiratory system with fever" is also being monitored. With regard to its trend over time, it is noted that during winter, the syndrome's morbidity surpassed the alert point only once, specifically on 16 January 2017. Additionally, KEELPNO monitors the seasonal flu across the country through a series of monitoring systems, which include those at the refugee and migrant Reception Centers. Data collected through this process are published on a weekly basis and feed into the decision making process for the management of the disease.

4. Please provide information on existing mechanisms to accelerate the process of transporting migrants from the overcrowded sites in Greece to other reception centers on the mainland.

As mentioned above, the coordinating center for migration (KEPOM) in cooperation with the UNHCR have transferred up to 3,500 people to the mainland since June 2016, mainly consisting of vulnerable persons, in order to decongest the reception facilities on the islands.

Regrettably, the decongestion of the islands is seriously hampered by the arbitrary interpretation of the EU-Turkey Statement of 18 March 2016 by the Turkish side, which claims that the Statement only applies to the five Greek islands in the Aegean Sea where "hotspots" are present.

5. What measures have been taken to ensure protection and special aid for children and young persons temporarily or definitely deprived of their family support?

The priority measures, which have been taken over the last 12 months in order to ensure the protection of minors temporarily or permanently deprived of family support are as follows:

1) New places of accommodation for unaccompanied minors are created in refugee and migrant facilities, which ensure the access to a wide array of services, such as psychosocial and medical services, education, legal aid, creative outlets. The number of these places has increased from 423 in March 2016 to 1282 in January 2017, while the construction of an additional 200 places is underway.

2) Measures are taken to ensure that minors will not remain under administrative detention or protective custody. Thanks to the continuous efforts of all authorities involved in the process, the duration of any detention of unaccompanied minors is the minimum possible. Minors have been granted priority access to housing facilities, while "safe zones" are being created in open reception centres as a temporary measure, which ensure specific standards. These "safe zones" offer access to the services, which are available in the special facilities for unaccompanied minors. As of now, three such "safe zones" are in operation, while the Greek authorities have asked NGOs funded by the EU to accelerate the creation of "safe zones" in all the open reception centers.

The Ministry of Labor, Social Security and Social Solidarity, in cooperation with the Ministry of Justice, is drafting legislation on the guardianship of third countries unaccompanied minors. The new legislation will ensure that the guardian's duties are not limited to the representation of the minor but also to his/her well being.

It should also be noted that schooling has become available for children since September 2016 and that the objective is to provide access to public schools to all refugee and migrant children by the end of the current school year. So far, more than 2500 children are going to school (aged 6-15 years old). It should be noted that many of the parents concerned were reluctant to enroll their children to these state run programs because Greece was not their destination country. Last but not least, a variety of dedicated activities for children are available in the Reception Centers.

6. Please share your strategy with respect to the provision of adequate housing to migrants, in accordance to international human rights obligations and standards.

The Reception and Identification service has appointed permanent coordinators at the Reception Centers in order to ensure their smooth operation. It cooperates closely with all the relevant government services, including the Ministry of Defense which has offered an important number of facilities, as well as with the UNHCR, DG ECHO and the NGO community with a view to securing adequate housing capacity for all refugees and migrants. Priority has been given to winterization: non-cold resistant tents have been replaced by more appropriate ones (polar type) and emergency steps have been taken to provide shelters and containers. In view of the severe weather conditions this winter, refugees and migrants were transferred to more adequate facilities and to hotel rooms despite strong opposition from the local communities. The process of upgrading the housing-accommodation facilities is underway, with a particular emphasis on the needs of vulnerable persons and unaccompanied minors.