



PROCEDURES SPECIALES DU
CONSEIL DES DROITS DE L'HOMME

SPECIAL PROCEDURES OF THE
HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

Mandate of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief

REFERENCE: AL G/SO 214 (56-23)
UNFICYP 1/2011

17 February 2011

Dear Ms. Buttenheim,

I have the honour to address you in my capacity as Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief pursuant to General Assembly resolution 60/251 and to Human Rights Council resolution 6/37.

As Special Rapporteur, I have been mandated to examine incidents that are incompatible with the provisions of the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief and to recommend remedial measures as appropriate. In this connection, my attention was drawn to an incident which took place on 25 December 2010, regarding worship by the Greek Orthodox Christian community in the villages of Rizokarpaso and Yialoussa.

Since UNFICYP also delivers humanitarian aid to Greek Cypriots living in the northern part of the island, I would be grateful if you could transmit the attached letter to the relevant Turkish Cypriot authorities. In this context I would like to emphasize the importance of ensuring that there are no human rights protection gaps and that all persons can effectively enjoy their fundamental rights, including freedom of religion or belief, wherever they live.

Please accept, Ms. Buttenheim, the assurances of my highest consideration.

Heiner Bielefeldt
Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief

Ms. Lisa M. Buttenheim
Special Representative of the Secretary General
and Head of the United Nations Peacekeeping
Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP)



Mandate of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief

REFERENCE: AL G/SO 214 (56-23)

17 February 2011

Dear Mr. Özgürün,

I have the honour to address you in my capacity as Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief pursuant to General Assembly resolution 60/251 and to Human Rights Council resolution 6/37. As Special Rapporteur, it is my duty to examine incidents that are incompatible with the provisions of the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief and to recommend remedial measures as appropriate.

In this connection, I would like to draw your attention to information I have received concerning an incident which took place on 25 December 2010, regarding worship by the Greek Orthodox Christian community in the villages of Rizokarpaso and Yialoussa.

According to information received:

On 25 December 2010, the Turkish Cypriot authorities reportedly interrupted the religious service taking place in the Church of Saint Sinesios in Rizokarpaso and demanded a cessation of the worship activities on the basis that that no permission for the conduct of church service had been obtained. The congregation was reportedly forced out of the church, with the church then subsequently being sealed. The ongoing religious service was gathered to celebrate a Christmas day liturgy service, in the town of Rizokarpaso, in the north of the island.

The town consists of a small Greek Orthodox population of approximately 350 people (compared to an estimated number of 3,000 Greek Orthodox persons in 1960). Reportedly, the Church of Saint Sinesios is one of seven religious sites in the area which are governed by a special status where religious services can be performed on a regular basis without requiring advance permission.

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It has also been reported that in another incident on 25 December 2010, Turkish Cypriot authorities refused permission for the performance of Christmas mass to take place in the Church of the Holy Trinity (Ayia Triada), in the nearby village of Yialoussa.

On 4 February 2011, Greek Orthodox Christian worshippers on the Karpas peninsula in the north of the island have been banned from holding evening masses. Reportedly, they are required to apply for permission from the “district officer” of Trikomo.

Reportedly, a new permission procedure for the conduct of church services has been introduced by the Turkish Cypriot authorities, requiring that all religious celebrations (apart from those on Sundays) in the village churches would need prior permission with at least 30 days advance notice.

The above mentioned incidents have reportedly raised serious concern among members of the small Greek Orthodox Christian community on exercising their right to worship and to exercise their freedom of religion.

While I do not wish to prejudge the accuracy of these allegations, I would like to emphasize the need to ensure freedom of religion or belief of all members of the Greek Orthodox Christian community in the north of the island in accordance with Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The Human Rights Committee, in its general comment no. 22, has stated that “The freedom to manifest religion or belief may be exercised ‘either individually or in community with others and in public or private’. The freedom to manifest religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching encompasses a broad range of acts. The concept of worship extends to ritual and ceremonial acts giving direct expression to belief, as well as various practices integral to such acts, including the building of places of worship, the use of ritual formulae and objects, the display of symbols, and the observance of holidays and days of rest.”

I would also like to recall that the General Assembly, in its resolution 64/164, urges “(g) To ensure, in particular, the right of all persons to worship, assemble or teach in connection with a religion or belief and their right to establish and maintain places for these purposes and the right of all persons to write, issue and disseminate relevant publications in these areas”.

Moreover, it is my responsibility under the mandate provided to me by the Human Rights Council, to seek to clarify all cases brought to my attention. In this context, I deem important to receive information on this case to allow me to have a clear picture of the situation and report back to the United Nations Human Rights Council:

1. Are the facts alleged in the above summary of the cases accurate?

2. Has a complaint been lodged with regard to the incidents mentioned above?

3. Please provide details of the permission procedure for the celebration of church services reportedly introduced by the Turkish Cypriot authorities, including information on the scope and application of the new procedure.

This letter does not in any way imply the expression of any opinion concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area, or of its authorities.

Please accept, Mr. Özgürün, the assurances of my highest consideration.

Heiner Bielefeldt
Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief