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Human Dimension Implementation Meeting (Warsaw, 29 September - 10 October 2008)
Working session 10: Tolerance and non-discrimination II (combating racism)

6 October 2008

Greece: Written contribution on rights groups denouncing Greek prosecutor's racist statement (http://www.justiceinitiative.org/db/resource2?res_id=104034)

Human rights groups denounced on 5 February 2008 as racist a statement by Greece's top prosecutor suggesting that certain ethnic groups are involved in crime. The rights groups demanded an apology and retraction.

The **Open Society Justice Initiative** and **Greek Helsinki Monitor** were reacting to a statement made by **Supreme Court Prosecutor George Sanidas** in December 2007. Sanidas, in describing crime in a section of Athens, singled out as perpetrators «*foreign women of African and non-African origin*» and «*athinganoi*.» The latter term is a pejorative reference to Roma. Sanidas has not amended or retracted his statement in the weeks since he made it.

*«Despite public criticism, Sanidas has not retracted or apologized for his remarks,» said **Panayote Dimitras, spokesperson for Greek Helsinki Monitor**. «As a result of this racial profiling, African women and Roma street vendors have been targeted and harassed by police. This racism is especially disturbing when it comes from Greece's top prosecutor; there is no place for such an attitude in 21st century Europe.»*

Sanidas made the statement in an order to the chief of the Hellenic Police, calling for a crackdown on crime in the historical center of Athens. The term 'athinganoi' is widely recognized as offensive; a Greek police memo states as much and says it should not be used by law enforcement officials.

*«It is unprofessional and inexcusable for the chief prosecutor to make blanket accusations that members of a particular ethnic group are involved in criminal activity,» said **Robert O. Varenik, acting executive director of the Open Society Justice Initiative**. «Profiling entire communities on the basis of their national origins is the prelude to wholesale disregard of their rights, and such openly offensive language adds insult to injury.»*

The rights groups noted that Sanidas' words were just the latest in a string of anti-Roma statements by Greek law enforcement authorities. They also noted that by targeting a specific racial or ethnic group, police are engaging in ethnic profiling, which violates European and international human rights standards.

In fact, in December 2007 Greece was found guilty of discrimination by the **European Court of Human Rights** in the case of *Petropoulou-Tsakiris v. Greece*. The court found a «*general discriminatory attitude on the part of the authorities*» while investigating claims by a Roma woman of police brutality. The woman claimed she was kicked by police during a search and subsequently miscarried as a result of the beating. The official investigation into her claims was not «*sufficiently thorough and effective,*» the court ruled.

The Justice Initiative is currently working to expose and reduce the practice of ethnic profiling by police throughout Europe; a Justice Initiative book examining ethnic and racial profiling in Europe will be published later this year.