



COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS
COMMISSAIRE AUX DROITS DE L'HOMME



Ref: CommHR/SG/sf 141-2010

Mr Neoklis SYLIKIOTIS
Minister of Interior of the Republic of Cyprus

Strasbourg, 29 June 2010

Dear Minister,

Further to our meeting in Nicosia on 10 June 2010, I would like to take this opportunity to follow up on our dialogue concerning the combat against trafficking in human beings and the human rights of asylum seekers and refugees.

With regard to the first issue, I warmly welcome the measures taken, in particular the abolition of the much criticised so-called cabaret artist visa and the introduction of the new action plan 2010 - 2012 to combat trafficking in human beings. During my visit I learned that there has been a decrease in the number of cabarets. However, it appears that other types of work permits, such as the one for bar maids, might be used to circumvent the law. This illustrates the need to be vigilant against organized crime and ensure that no type of visa or working permit can be abused for such unlawful purposes as trafficking in human beings.

I appreciate the measures taken to raise awareness within the police force and the judiciary as well as of the general public. As we agreed at our meeting, more could be done to address the issue of demand. I reiterate the recommendation contained in my 2008 report to conduct a study into the demand for sexual services with a view to identifying effective measures that would eliminate the nexus of this demand with trafficking in human beings. In this context, cooperation with international bodies and other countries with experience in this domain could be sought.

I commend the continuous operation of the government-run shelter dedicated for victims of trafficking which I visited in July 2008. In this context I strongly encourage that budgetary cuts to combat the economic crisis do not affect adequate social services including psychological treatment for victims of trafficking.

With regard to the human rights of asylum seekers and refugees, I note that Cyprus continues to receive high numbers of asylum seekers in proportion to its population. I am aware that the division of the island with easy access to the Government controlled area of the Republic through the Green Line might be a complicating factor.

I welcome the positive measures taken by your government to improve access to health care and to the labour market for asylum seekers as well as to provide for legal aid. However, during my visit I was informed that in practice some obstacles remain. I would appreciate more information on the current provisions to obtain a work permit and their implementation with regard to asylum seekers and refugees. Furthermore I urge you to ensure that access to health care as well as to legal aid is not hampered by administrative obstacles.

I have also noted the continuation of the general policy of releasing rejected asylum seekers from detention after six months if they cannot be deported within this time frame. I am, however, concerned about reports on cases of individuals who have been or are still detained considerably longer. In this context I would suggest an individual examination of each case in order to assess the proportionality of any detention exceeding six months.

Lastly, I welcome the fact that all foreigners, including asylum seekers and recognized refugees, may apply for Cypriot citizenship after seven years of legal residence in the country. You informed me that unfortunately due to the high number of applications there is currently a bottleneck in the processing of such applications. I believe that obtaining citizenship is a major step towards integration and encourage you to seek solutions to speed up the procedure.

I look forward to your reply and to continuing our constructive dialogue on the above issues.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Thomas Hammarberg', with a stylized, flowing script.

Thomas Hammarberg