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Embargoed! Speech to the ODHIR for the HDIM conference
Victoria Sofitel Hotel, Warsaw
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Working Session 13 Tolerance and non-discrimination II: Review of the implementation of commitments on promotion of mutual respect and understanding

Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen.

Embargoed! is again extremely honoured and privileged to address this very important gathering of OSCE members and respected fellow NGOs.

We are a multi-ethnic human rights group based in London campaigning to bring an unconditional end to the unjust international isolation faced by Turkish Cypriots living in North Cyprus.

As we head into 2012, negotiations for peace between the two leaders in Cyprus, Dervis Eroglu and Demitris Christofias continue, but so does the Cyprus problem. With the Republic of Cyprus, which has not represented Turkish Cypriots since 1964, due to take over the Presidency of the Council of the European Union on the 1st July next year, it is all the more important that the spotlight be focused on Cyprus.

Embargoed! is concerned about how the Republic will use the influence of their new position within the OSCE region considering the fact that xenophobia is still very much institutionalised. We address you today in the hope that by drawing attention to the continuation of intolerance against Turkish Cypriots in particular, pressure can be placed on the Republic of Cyprus to promote equality, respect and dignity not just for all Greek Cypriots but for *every* person on the island, be they Turkish Cypriot, Maronite, Palestinian or from any other ethnic background.

The European Network against Racism (ENAR) recently reported that there has been a gradual increase in racially motivated crimes and violence in South Cyprus. Laws meant to hinder racism have not been completely implemented. As a result it does not regard Cyprus as being able to take the necessary precautions to control discrimination on the basis of national origin, race and colour. The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance ("ECRI") has also commented that there is a lack of will to effectively fight racism in South Cyprus.

In 2009 we informed this forum about the Champions League Football match between APOEL Nicosia and Chelsea where xenophobic banners were displayed in 5 different languages proclaiming "Cyprus is Greek". Xenophobia of this kind and racism still continue within the sporting world in Cyprus despite sanctions against offending teams. APOEL FC has been fined on more than one occasion by UEFA for racism.

Since then, in December 2010, the APOEL Nicosia basketball team has been banned from playing in front of spectators for three matches and fined €40,000 by FIBA, the world basketball governing body because of racially aggravated violence after a match with a Turkish team, Pinar Karsiyaka. Approximately 500 Greek Cypriot fans attempted to storm the Turkish teams' dressing room and attack players.

Furthermore in January 2011 masked Greek Cypriots attacked a vehicle carrying four Turkish Cypriot passengers including a young child. The incident occurred prior to a football match between APOEL Nicosia and rival team Omonia. The Turkish Cypriots did not feel that the Greek Cypriot police would take the report seriously so waited until they had crossed the border to report the matter to the Turkish Cypriot police.

Such acts of violence are repeatedly blamed on hooliganism but are all too often motivated by racism and intolerance. The sanctions placed by UEFA and FIBA have not been enough to encourage the teams involved to promote respect and tolerance of other fans and teams. It is a particular concern for Embargoed! that the examples of violence following sporting events are part of a wider problem of racism and intolerance directed against Turkish Cypriots.

This problem is not only apparent at sporting events. In May 2011 it was reported in the Greek Cypriot newspaper, *Cyprus Mail* that the Greek Resistance Movement ("KEA") had organised a series of events and demonstrations against what they regard as the 'Islamisation' of Cyprus. In addition to this Turkish Cypriot newspaper, *Kibris* reported on July 22nd that various members of a Greek Cypriot extreme nationalist

organisation, ELAM, terrorised and vandalised a Turkish Cypriot neighbourhood in Larnaca by painting over signs bearing Turkish street names. This incident was not covered in the Greek Cypriot media.

The language and style of these attacks are a classic symptom of the growing Islamophobia across Europe. In the Republic of Cyprus Islamophobia and intolerance towards anything Turkish goes hand in hand.

The reluctance of the Greek Cypriot media to hold its own people to account, the increase in racism in schools noted by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance in the fourth report on Cyprus and the lack of will to go further than condemning acts of violence as more than just hooliganism, all give an indication to how deep rooted racism is, in the Republic of Cyprus.

This will indicate to the truly neutral international observers that the media are complicit in the efforts to trivialise incidences of racism and intimidation that are directed against Turkish Cypriots.

Embargoed! has repeatedly raised concerns of xenophobia and intolerance at these sessions. The Far Right Group ELAM submitted candidates in the recent general elections and they are known to have very strong links with Chryssi Avgi who are an even more extreme far right group based in Athens and who have enjoyed recent success in the Athens council elections

Embargoed! calls upon the HDIM to make the racism, intolerance and hate crimes which have been highlighted in this submission a serious focus of its future activities and to encourage the Republic of Cyprus to take genuine steps in order to institutionalise respect and dignity for all peoples of Cyprus.

Thank you for listening.