

Role of Civil Society in the Protection of Human Rights in Cyprus

Sixty years after the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted by the United Nations, it is indispensable to remind its *Article 2* stating “(...) *Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration (...) no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non-self-governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty*”.

The Turkish Cypriot Human Rights Foundation (TCHRF) and network partners see the role of civil society organisations as particularly crucial for the protection of human rights in North Cyprus. TCHRF monitors a wide variety of human rights issues in North Cyprus (NC) and makes relevant recommendations to the pertinent authorities. TCHRF also monitors human rights practices in the Republic of Cyprus (RoC) and can therefore also report on discriminations there engaging the responsibility of the RoC government in the protection of human rights of Cypriots belonging to the Turkish Community.

Unlike most countries, there is no comprehensive monitoring of the human rights situation in North Cyprus yet. So far, there is no public institution entrusted with this task and no civil society organisation or network has been systematically collecting relevant data. There is no parliamentary human rights commission, specially appointed human rights or minority rights ombudsman or institution operating a systematic human rights recording and reporting system yet.

The level of respect for and implementation of human rights in North Cyprus have therefore never been comprehensively analysed and documented. A few international bodies have presented situation reports on North Cyprus but none was able to offer a comprehensive and systematic analysis of the issues or ways to implement remedial action.

TCHRF, established 3 years ago, has since then monitored the human rights situation and reported (so far merely in Turkish language) on a few issues such as

prison and detention conditions, trafficking of human beings and on four 'invisible groups' (women, children, LGBT, and Persons with Disabilities) within the community. It is presently preparing a Human rights mapping project including 11 research studies on priority areas identified. The findings of the studies will be summarised in 11 reports to be published in Turkish and English. Each report will look at local and international legal standards while providing case studies and interview results in North Cyprus and make topic specific recommendations on how to address and tackle the problems encountered.

Out of these 11 research topics which, due to time constraints, I will be able to merely briefly list here, three issues are crucial with regard to their reconciliation potential as they represent repeated claims about the lack of human rights in North Cyprus by the Greek Cypriots: minority rights, property rights and missing persons.

The 11 vulnerable groups and topics to be covered are as follows:

1. Women
2. Rights of Persons with Disabilities
3. Rights of Persons Belonging to Minority Groups
4. Refugee Rights
5. Human smuggling and Trafficking in Persons
6. Detainees Rights
7. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Rights
8. Rights of the Child
9. Property Rights
10. Missing Persons
11. Rights of Migrant Workers and their Families

Details on above topics can be found in a document displayed on the desks outside this hall and on the ODIHR website.

In conclusion, we would like to make the following recommendations to OSCE/ODIHR, participating states and other relevant international institutions or NGOs to address the problems mentioned above.

1. The lack of international enforcement in North Cyprus does not prevent us from doing our work; but it nonetheless forces us to carry out human rights relevant activities practically without any international assistance, expertise, reporting or international pressure upon our authorities to better protect our human rights. We therefore strongly encourage OSCE/ODIHR, participating states and other relevant international institutions or NGOs to establish direct dialogue with both Turkish Cypriot NGOs and authorities in order to address these problems.
2. We would like to encourage international NGOs such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch to establish a bureau or branch in North Cyprus in order to monitor the human rights situation and to report on relevant practices there.
3. Finally, we would like to encourage the international community to end the isolations imposed upon Turkish Cypriots which by itself causes gross human rights violations as you will be able to read in the booklet “Turkish Cypriots: The Excluded Europeans” distributed and displayed during this meeting.

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