

Greece

Mr. President,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great honor for me to appear before the Human Rights Council on the occasion of the consideration and final adoption of the outcome report of Greece's Universal Periodic Review.

Mr. President,

Greece considers the Universal Periodic Review as one of the most important innovations in the functioning of the universal human rights protection system. It is a mechanism which provides a unique opportunity to all States, on an equal footing, to present their record in the human rights field, to share good practices and to address concrete recommendations to their fellow member States. It is an expression of the potential of the common, multilateral, constructive engagement of the UN membership, which allows the expression of genuine concerns and serves one ultimate goal: the advancement of the level of protection of human rights, to the benefit of all rights holders and, in particular, all those persons belonging to vulnerable groups.

The UPR report was drawn up in accordance with the "General Guidelines for the Preparation of Information under the Universal Periodic Review". Its drafting was coordinated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in close cooperation with all Ministries involved in the promotion and protection of human rights. The report focused on issues which have been the subject of particular attention by human rights mechanisms at the universal and regional level, as well as NGOs. During the drafting state, a meeting was held with NGOs representatives, following an open-ended invitation to all civil society stakeholders posted on the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and disseminated to the National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR), as well as to journalists accredited in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Subsequently, the draft report was submitted to the NCHR, in which six NGOs as well as other human rights institutions participate. Views expressed in the above consultation process were duly taken into consideration in the finalization of the UPR report.

The review of Greece was held on 9 May 2011. I would like to thank the members of the group of rapporteurs (troika), the Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia and Uganda, for facilitating the review, as well as the Secretariat, for ensuring the smooth conduct of the process. I would also like to express our appreciation to the member States of the Working Group on the UPR, which raised, orally or in writing, a number of questions, comments and recommendations thus manifesting a real interest in human rights issues concerning my country.

During the interactive dialogue, 48 delegations delivered oral statements. In total, 124 recommendations were formulated. My delegation was able to immediately accept 97 recommendations. This proves the readiness of the Greek Government to acknowledge challenges to be met and to continue its efforts to improve the level of protection of human rights. This also reflects the quality of the contribution of member states in the Working Group, which resulted in the successful identification of a number of pressing issues that Greece needs to address. Only 9 recommendations were rejected, while 18 recommendations were left to be further considered by the competent authorities. Greece provided in writing and in detail its responses to the pending recommendations, among which 13 were accepted, 3 were rejected and 2 were partly accepted and partly rejected, as they referred to the signing and/or ratification of different treaties. Overall, 112 recommendations were accepted and 14 recommendations were rejected.

I would like to touch upon some of the issues which were raised during the examination of our UPR report.

Several delegations recommended the **ratification of core human rights treaties**. The relevant preparatory work is underway with regard to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol and the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance. The competent authorities are actively considering the issue of the designation of the national preventive mechanism, which will allow the ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. However, we are not ready for the time being to sign and

ratify the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, a relatively new international instrument, which has been ratified by three States so far and has not yet been entered into force. We will be following closely the practice that will be developed by the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and we will review our position at an appropriate stage. Furthermore we can not accept the recommendation to sign and to ratify the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families. We are fully aware of the importance that a number of delegations attach to the above instrument. However, some of the Convention's provisions are not in harmony with existing European Union and national norms and policies. Having said that, I would like to stress that the situation of third country nationals legally residing in Greece is continuously improving, in a way that promotes their integration in the social, economic and public life of the country.

A great number of delegations expressed their concerns about **the situation of irregular migrants and asylum seekers**. This is indeed a most pressing challenge and a priority issue for our authorities. It has been recognized by all stakeholders that the Greek national asylum and migration management system is under unprecedented pressure, that the existing capacity and resources have been under a severe strain and that this problem needs to be tackled at the EU level. We are already implementing the National Action Plan on Migration Management, with the support of the European Commission, the European Asylum Support Office and the contribution and participation of the EU Member States and International Organizations (UNHCR, IOM etc). A flexible and decentralized mechanism has been established for a transitional period, with the participation of the UNHCR, to clear the heavy backlog and to ensure a rapid review of asylum requests. Five asylum committees are already in operation. A law adopted in January 2011 provides for the establishment of an Asylum Agency and of a First Reception Service for Immigrants. In the Reception Centers to be created, a new screening process will allow identification of, and support and guidance to, persons entitled to international protection. Furthermore, Greece implements programs of assisted voluntary returns, co-financed by the European Return Fund, in close cooperation with the IOM.

In the framework of the completion of the Common European Asylum System (by 2012), Greece supports policies and initiatives based on the principle of fair sharing of

responsibilities and solidarity and strives to enhance its cooperation on migration governance with international organizations and echoes their concern and interest in amending the Dublin II EU regulation.

A recurrent issue in the Working Group was the promotion of **gender equality** and the **fight against domestic violence**. The General Secretariat for Gender Equality has launched a National Action Plan on Substantive Gender Equality for the period 2010-2013, covering all spheres of social life. Prevention and combating of violence against women in their family and private life, in the workplace and in society more broadly is among the strategic goals of the Action Plan. As a best practice in this respect, I would like to mention the operation of a bilingual (Greek and English) telephone line for the support of victims of gender-based violence. The line operates on a 24/hours basis and offers specialized information and counseling services to women – victims of all forms of violence. Other best practices are the strengthening of supervision and monitoring of gender equality in all state policies, the support to women's organizations and NGOs for the elaboration and implementation of Action Plans in favor of gender equality, the elaboration of a Manual, in cooperation with the UNHCR, addressed to professionals dealing with refugees, aiming at the protection of women refugees etc.

The fight against **trafficking in human beings** will continue unabated, based on the four pillars of prosecution of the traffickers, protection of the victims, prevention, in particular through addressing the issue of demand and partnership among all stakeholders, including NGOs.

On the situation of **Roma**, we are fully aware of the challenges that remain to be addressed. The Integrated Action Plan for the social integration of Greek Roma (2002 – 2008), has yielded positive results, in particular in the field of housing. Lessons learned from the assessment of the Action Plan will contribute to the development of a holistic administrative intervention based on synergy of actions at the local, regional and central level, bearing in mind the crucial role of comprehensive local intervention projects. Furthermore, educational programs are implemented, which pursue a two-fold goal: to enhance the access of Roma children to the educational structures of the State since a very early age and to improve the education provided to Roma children,

in particular through the involvement of Roma school mediators, with no exclusion and/or segregation. Another important measure is the establishment of Educational Priority Zones aiming at ensuring integration of students from areas with low educational and socioeconomic indicators, including Roma pupils.

The legislative framework against **hate speech and racism** will soon be updated and strengthened through the transposition into the Greek legal order of a relevant EU Council Framework Decision.

Another important development is the adoption of a legislative amendment with a view to accelerate the procedures for the **construction of a mosque** in Athens, through the appropriate transformation of an existing building in a State owned plot of land. The use of the mosque, following the completion of its construction, will be ceded *gratis* by the State, for an indefinite period of time, to the Foundation provided for in the Law, which will administer, manage and maintain the mosque.

We share the view of many delegations that no effort should be spared to further ensure the **accountability of law enforcement personnel**. In this respect, a new law was adopted in 2011 which establishes, within the Ministry of Citizens' Protection, an Office, subject to the Minister, responsible for handling alleged instances of abuse by Police, Coast Guard and Fire Brigade officers. The process for the staffing of the Office is currently under way.

To conclude, Mr. President, I would like to reiterate Greece's commitment to ensure an effective **follow-up to UPR recommendations**, which is a prerequisite for the credibility of the whole mechanism. The National Commission for Human Rights has already been informed of the review of our report by the Council's Working Group. The outcome of the UPR will be widely disseminated to government authorities, relevant stakeholders and to the general public. Civil society and national human rights institutions will be closely associated to the follow-up activities that will be undertaken.

