

Mr. Kostis Papaioannou
Secretary-General for Transparency and Human Rights at the Ministry of Justice

Subject: Abolition of blasphemy articles from the Greek criminal code

2 June 2016

Dear Secretary-General

Our organizations have appreciated that, in your concluding statement during Greece's review by the Human Rights Committee on 20 October 2015, as head of the Greek delegation you made the unprompted commitment that Greece will extend civil partnership to same-sex couples, legally recognize gender identity, as well as abolish outdated criminal provisions such as unnatural indecency (347 Criminal Code) and the articles on blasphemy (198 and 199 Criminal Code).¹

We welcome the fact that with Law 4356/2015 civil partnership was extended to same-sex couples and the crime of unnatural indecency was abolished, while an experts' committee was set up to produce a draft law on the recognition of gender identity.

We have been concerned however that the articles on blasphemy were not abolished, while new charges for blasphemy are pressed by prosecutors, for example on 1 February 2016,² and the trial on appeal of blogger Philipos Loizos (aka "Elder Pastitsios"), convicted at first instance for blasphemy to a suspended prison sentence of ten months on 16 January 2014, has yet to be scheduled almost two and a half years later.

We therefore appreciated that the delegation to the UN Human Rights Council that you headed for Greece's Universal Periodic Review expressed on 9 May 2016 its support inter alia to the recommendation by Brazil that Greece "*Ensure[s] religious freedom and tolerance, by measures such as decriminalizing blasphemy and protecting the rights of religious minorities, atheists and agnostics.*"³

We now urge you to see to it that the government promptly tables before Parliament the abolition of the two blasphemy articles 198 and 199 from Greece's Criminal Code⁴ and that prosecutors or courts drop all related charges pending before them.

We thank you in advance for your attention to this appeal and are looking forward to your reply.

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¹ <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=16622&LangID=E>

² http://www.astynomia.gr/index.php?option=ozo_content&lang&perform=view&id=60127&Itemid=1638

³ https://extranet.ohchr.org/sites/upr/Sessions/25session/Greece/Documents/Draft%20Report-A_HRC_WG.6_25_L.4_Greece.docx

⁴ **Article 198 of Criminal Code (CC):** "*Malicious Blasphemy: 1. One who publicly and maliciously and by any means blasphemes God shall be punished by imprisonment for not more than two years. 2. Except for cases under paragraph 1, one who by blasphemy publicly manifests a lack of respect for the divinity, shall be punished by jailing for not more than six months or by pecuniary penalty of not more than 3,000 euros.*" **Article 199 CC:** "*Blasphemy Concerning Religions: One who publicly and maliciously and by any means blasphemes the Eastern Orthodox Church of Christ or any other religion tolerated in Greece shall be punished by imprisonment for not more than two years.*"

The signatory organizations

Transnational organizations

1. Atheist Alliance International
2. European Humanist Federation
3. International Humanist and Ethical Union

National organizations

1. Action Luxembourg Ouvert et Solidaire - Ligue des Droits de l'Homme a.s.b.l.
2. Allianz vun Humanisten, Atheisten an Agnostiker Lëtzebuerg (Luxembourg)
3. American Atheists
4. American Humanist Association
5. Asociatia Umanista Romana (Romanian Humanist Association)
6. Association humaniste du Québec (Canada)
7. Atheist & Agnostic Alliance Pakistan
8. Atheist Ireland
9. Atheist Union of Greece
10. British Columbia Humanist Association (Canada)
11. British Humanist Association
12. Bund für Geistesfreiheit Erlangen (Germany)
13. Center for Civil Courage (Croatia)
14. Center for Inquiry Canada
15. Center for Inquiry USA
16. Central London Humanists (UK)
17. Centre d'action laïque (Belgium)
18. Centro di Documentazione, Ricerca e Studi sulla Cultura Laica "Piero Calamandrei" (Italy)
19. Coordinamento Nazionale delle Consulte per la Laicità delle Istituzioni (Italy)
20. Cyprus Humanist Association
21. Dachverband Freier Weltanschauungsgemeinschaften e.V. (Germany)
22. deMens.nu (Belgium)
23. EGALE (France)
24. Freethought Society (USA)
25. Freidenker-Vereinigung der Schweiz (Freethinkers Association of Switzerland)
26. Freidenkerbund Österreichs (Austria)
27. Greek Helsinki Monitor
28. Humanist Association of Canada
29. Humanist Society Scotland
30. Humanist Union of Greece
31. Humanisterna (Swedish Humanist Association)
32. Humanistisch Verbond (Dutch Humanist Association - the Netherlands)
33. Humanistischer Verband Deutschlands (Germany)
34. Humanistisk Samfund (Danish Humanist Society)
35. Kazimierz Lyszczyński Atheist Foundation (Poland)
36. LibMov (Italy)
37. Malta Humanist Association
38. National Secular Society (UK)
39. North American Tarksheel (Rationalist) Society-Ontario (Canada)
40. North London Humanist Group (UK)
41. Norwegian Humanist Association (Human-Etisk Forbund)
42. Polish Humanist Association

43. Polskie Stowarzyszenie Racjonalistów (The Polish Association of Rationalists)
44. Russian Humanist Society
45. Secular Student Alliance (USA)
46. Sidmennt - The Icelandic Ethical Humanist Association
47. Society for Humanism (SOCH – Nepal)
48. Unione degli Atei e degli Agnostici Razionalisti (UAAR - Italy)
49. Union des Familles Laïques (UFAL - France)
50. Vapaa-ajattelijain Liitto ry (Finland)
51. Watford Area Humanists (UK)