

## **Legal harassment and criminalisation of Human Rights defenders in Cyprus**

On March 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2011, a legal action was taken against Doros Polykarpou, KISA's Director. KISA is a partner organisation of Migreurop and has been, for many years now, the victim of a continuous legal harassment as well as political pressures to stalk its activities. This additional trial happens in a broader context of growing racism and xenophobia in the country.

In November 2010, KISA co-organised the Rainbow Festival, a multicultural and joyful event which brings together many participants, especially families. This event was sponsored by the ministry of Interior, the ministry of Culture, the Youth Board, and was supported, among other, by the EC representation in Cyprus.

In the reaction to the growing racist attacks and crimes<sup>1</sup>, KISA decided to organise the Rainbow Festival in Larnaca on November 5th, 2011, as a counter event to a fascist demonstration organised the same day by many nationalist organisations (such as the "Greek Resistance Movement" and the "Movement for the Salvation of Cyprus").

To protect the safety of the participants, among them children, KISA demanded from the authorities that the march wouldn't pass by the sea front, where the festival was held. Nevertheless, the police authorized this "pacific march against illegal immigration" (so was the formulation by the police) to advance in direction of the Rainbow Festival. After violent verbal xenophobic provocations, demonstrators eventually physically attacked the participants to the festival (see [video](#)). A Turkish Cypriot participant was stabbed, and two other foreigners, who were not even taking part to the festival, were seriously injured. All three were brought to the hospital.

These very serious incidents, which have been [denunciated](#) by many organisations in Europe, still go on in the country, and sadly didn't lead to strong measures being taken by authorities to combat the rise of xenophobia and exacerbated nationalism. On the contrary. Whereas no one has been arrested in relation to the three persons being attacked in Larnaca last November, Doros Polykarpou is now prosecuted against for rioting and participating in an illegal assembly.

Stalked in its activities by the authorities through unfounded legal actions, KISA is the victim of a serious legal harassment. This event echoes difficulties encountered by other movements in Europe and these various attacks aimed at intimidating human rights defenders (arrest of No Border members in Brussels in October 2010 ; decrease of public funding to the Spanish association CEAR after the publication of critical reports on the detention conditions of migrants ; arrest of activists because of « delict of solidarity » in France).

At a time of a worrying intensification of racism in Europe and of a constant harshening of migration policies which feeds prejudice and intolerance, Migreurop recalls its solidarity with the civil society organisations oppressed by the authorities, and expresses its deep concern in regards to the action they are the victims of.

Migreurop network wishes also to recall that it's of the political representatives' responsibility to oppose racism and intolerance, not to silence the voice of those who try to take part to the democratic debate and to promote human rights.

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<sup>1</sup>Criminal fires, attacks. Regular organisation of anti-migrants marches by fascist groups close to neo-nazi groups for some.