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Address of the Representative of the TURKISH CYPRIOT HUMAN RIGHTS FOUNDATION

Mustafa Abitoğlu

to the 2008 Human Dimension Implementation Meeting of the OSCE

Ultra-nationalist sentiments in the Republic of Cyprus and the very often particular hostile role of the Orthodox Church are inciting to hatred and discriminations against Turkish Cypriots

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Last week our NGO was focusing on the human rights situation in North Cyprus including issues such as the rights of persons belonging to minorities, property rights and missing persons, problems which mostly arose out of the unresolved Cyprus conflict.

Consequently we would like to speak today more about the discrimination and segregation of Turkish Cypriots in the Republic of Cyprus as well as in international forums or networks. For more details please refer to our booklet displayed outside this meeting room to document this exclusion of citizens in Europe.

In order to make the on-going peace negotiations under the UN auspices more likely to succeed, discriminations on both sides have to be reported and combated!

To say the least, certain tendencies and actions in the RoC are contrary to the spirit of peace and foster further discrimination against Turkish Cypriots who are allegedly known to be “equal partner” of a would be reunited state.

Even though there are priests and bishops supporting reconciliation and the on-going peace process, the role of the church can very often be seen as particularly unfriendly and biased. People remember an Archbishop’s statement during the Annan plan discussion, warning that “those who vote in favour of the Plan would be burned in hell” !

Even more worrying are the role and actions of political extremists (my colleague will make a detailed presentation on Xrisi Avgi in the further session this afternoon).

The role of the media (as my colleague has presented in another statement and session) plays also a highly adverse role for both the sake of reconciliation between the two communities as well as the on-going peace negotiations between the two leaders.

Discrimination also occur on a daily basis in the court system of the RoC, where Turkish Cypriots' representation and translation are not provided or where their court cases are not even being investigated.

In the field of education, international observers confirm that considerable efforts have been made in the Turkish Cypriot Community with regard to the revising of history books, the introduction this year of Greek language classes in the Turkish Cypriot schools and the opening of a Greek Cypriot secondary school in the Karpas peninsula.

These efforts have as of today not been reciprocated in the RoC where there are no Turkish schools or even language classes and where the revision of history books has been announced to take several more years while recent and alarming surveys clearly indicate that pupils are far from understanding reconciliation needs and issues.

We want, however to mention and to encourage the recent initiative taken by the Greek Cypriote Ministry of Education initialising the introduction of reconciliation themes in the school programmes while deploring that this initiative has strongly been opposed by some teacher unions and the ultra-nationalist camp including Church representatives.

Finally, we would like to emphasize that more and more Greek Cypriot civil society organizations seek increased cooperation with Turkish Cypriot NGOs in order to promote common action and projects in which we strongly believe as a crucial mean to establish a common understanding and to rebuild a 'shared homeland'.

Mustafa Abitoğlu, Coordinator

Turkish Cypriot Human Rights Foundation

North Cyprus