

Ms. Maria Yannakaki
Secretary-General for Transparency and Human Rights at the Ministry of Justice

Subject: Abolition of blasphemy articles from the Greek criminal code

6 January 2017

Dear Secretary-General

Our organizations congratulate you on your recent appointment as **Secretary-General for Transparency and Human Rights at the Ministry of Justice** and send you their best wishes for 2017.

We also recall with appreciation your moderation of the conference on “**State-Church Relations and Blasphemy Laws in Greece and in the rest of Europe**” organized in Athens on 16 May 2015 in the framework of the General Assembly of **European Humanist Federation** in which you unequivocally supported the abolition of Articles 198 and 199 of the Greek Criminal Code criminalizing blasphemy.

As you know, our organizations have since launched an international campaign for the abolition of these provisions, in the framework of their on-going campaign for the abolition of such articles from the laws of several countries around the world. We were particularly pleased that, in August 2016, the **UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD)** included in its [concluding observations on Greece](#) the following:

Blasphemy laws

18. The Committee is concerned about the continuing existence of blasphemy legal provisions and the risk that they may be used in a discriminatory manner that is prohibited under the provisions of the Convention (art. 5 (d) (vii)).

19. The Committee recommends the State party to abolish articles 198 and 199 on blasphemy from its Criminal Code.

The UN body had taken in consideration the **Greek Government’s** related public commitment a month earlier, through [a release by your Ministry](#), to seek the abolition of these provisions:

“Alongside efforts to address racism and hate speech, the State must take steps to fully guarantee freedom of expression. The Ministry of Justice, Transparency and Human Rights announces that the decriminalization of blasphemy has been referred to the Legislative Committee for the revision of the Penal Code. This position will be articulated in the near future during our country’s examination by the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (August 3-4 in Geneva). Under Greek Criminal Law, [imposition of] a penalty requires the execution of an act, the definition of the latter containing a weighing of its empirical-provable results. However, in the case of blasphemy, there is a complete lack of harmful consequences of the act provable before a court. Therefore, there the concept of a crime is indiscernible.”

As you recall, the highlight of the May 2015 conference was the presentation by **Philippos Louizos** (“**Elder Pastitsios**”) on “*How I personally experienced blasphemy laws in Greece.*” **Philippos Louizos** was convicted in January 2014 at first instance to a suspended sentence of ten months in prison for the violation of the blasphemy Article 199 of the Greek Criminal Code. His trial on appeal has been set for 2 March 2017 before the **Eighth Three-Member Misdemeanors Court of Athens**.

Consistent with both your **Government**’s position and the **UN CERD**’s recommendation we urge you to see to it that the two legal provisions on the criminalization of blasphemy are abolished before that trial which if held would be another violation of freedom of expression, of religious freedom as well as of the **International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination**.

Kind regards,



Andrew Copson
IHEU President



Pierre Galand
EHF President