

PICUM & ENAR

JOINT STATEMENT

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Racist attacks in Cyprus: national authorities must put a stop to the criminalization of undocumented migrants and their supporters

The Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants (PICUM) and the European Network Against Racism (ENAR) are deeply concerned by a violent attack against the participants of the Rainbow Festival which took place in Larnaca, Cyprus on 5th November. Specifically, regarding the failure of the police to protect victims of this attack led by far-right groups. We call on Cypriot authorities to start an independent investigation and take a strong stand against the criminalization of migrants, especially undocumented migrants, and their advocates.

The migrant support organisation KISA, a member of the European networks PICUM and ENAR, held its 13th annual Rainbow Festival on 5th November. This year, the colourful festival aimed to highlight “the need to deal with the economic crisis together with migrants, who are its most vulnerable victims, and not against them”. The festival was organised with the support of the European Commission’s representation in Cyprus and was addressed by the Head of the Authority against Discrimination and Racism of the Ombudsman’s Office, the Mayor of Larnaca, and the European Commission representation.

To take a strong stand against the racist sentiment towards migrants in Cyprus, the Festival was held at the same time and place as a right-wing demonstration to protest against irregular immigration. Both events had received official permission from the Cypriot police. All participating organisations and groups in the festival agreed that they would not be provocative and asked the police, before and during the event, to keep the Neo-Nazi demonstrators at an appropriate distance in order to avoid conflict.!

Nonetheless, the police did not take the necessary measures to protect the festival but opened the way for the Neo-Nazis to march through it. After the racist demonstrators started throwing chairs at the Rainbow Festival participants, the police did not intervene. This situation enabled Neo-Nazi demonstrators to threaten and assault those attending the festival. A total of 13

people were hospitalised. Further away from the main venue, Turkish Cypriots musicians who performed at the festival were hit with baseball bats and one was stabbed in the chest.

None of the racists were arrested, while six participants of the Rainbow Festival spent the night in jail, without any explanation as to the reason of their detention or the offences under investigation.

Michele LeVoy, PICUM's Director, said: "We urge the Cypriot government to set up an independent inquiry to investigate police's responsibility and address the problem of criminalization of undocumented migrants and their advocates. The rise of the extreme right is a real threat to European democracy and has certainly promoted the perception of undocumented migrants as criminals. Fighting irregular migration by denying basic social rights and condemning humanitarian aid, runs against the fundamentals of democratic societies based on the universality of human rights."

Michaël Privot, ENAR's Director, added: "This incident sends a disastrous message to the victims of racism, and not reacting to it has the potential to foster a growing sense of impunity for racist hate in Europe. We therefore urge the Cypriot government to implement the Framework Decision on combating racism and xenophobia immediately, all the more so in a climate of rising right-wing extremism across Europe. It is urgent that they firmly condemn the rhetoric of these groups and take all relevant actions to foster social cohesion, equality and respect for the fundamental rights of all individuals in Cyprus, irrespective of their origin."

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