



DEFENCE FOR CHILDREN INTERNATIONAL (DCI) STATEMENT BEFORE THE 45th SESSION of the UN HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

DCI expresses its deep concern about the policies applied (and those announced) by the Greek Government as response to the Covid-19 outbreak in the country and their impact on the children on the move population.

The Greek Government has repeatedly pushed for the establishment of closed detention centers for migrants who enter the country from Turkey, with the purpose of their eventual deportation. After facing months of obstacles, including the opposition of human rights groups to the construction of such detention centers, recent measures taken ostensibly to control the spread of COVID-19 are paving the way to the mass detention of children on the move in the Aegean islands where the so called Hotspots are established.

The Greek Government recently announced its plan to turn the Hotspots and the surrounding areas into well guarded 'concentration camps' with locked gates and multiple barren courtyards with limited access to free movement.

We as a global movement defending children's dignity, we are struggling to see the justification of such an enforced mass detention of the children living in such inhumane conditions in the Hotspots and the surrounding areas as a response to the Covid-19 outbreak. Right now in the Hotspots there are children unaccompanied or with their families who are being exposed to real threats of their integrity and life. Such measures will only deepen their trauma and expose them to further risks.

The Greek Government should be prioritizing the protection of these children instead of trapping their childhood further into closed massive detention centers.

The Greek Government has the obligation to follow another direction driven by the values enriched in the text of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Instead of shutting down the Hotspots who have been functioning as like detention facilities for the child population residing there, the Greek State is planning to enforce harsher restrictions of freedom on the name of public interest.

DCI Greece observes with great agony the escalation of the Government's policy to reply to the Covid-19 outbreak with stricter for the children's on the move liberty

measures. So far the official reaction was the unnecessary enforcement of a mass quarantine lockdown in the Refugee Camps when the rest of the population was enjoying their right to free movement. This violates the right of the children on the move in Greece to receive equal protection as to the one offered to the rest of the child population in the country without discrimination due to their status as migrant children.

Additionally, DCI Greece has documented the increase of the length of time unaccompanied minors are detained under 'protective custody' in police stations due to the measures taken in the light of Covid-19 outbreak. Precisely, DCI Greece came across children who although a safe placement had been found for them, the Authorities did not proceed with their transfer to them due to the pandemic.

DCI calls the Greek Government to comply with its obligation to set these children 'free' from harm and inhumane living conditions. Covid-19 should in no way be used as an excuse to pave the way for further mass violation of the right of these children to freedom. Their childhood should not be kept in limbo behind locked gates and barbed wires.