



## Oral Statement

Human Rights Council 49<sup>th</sup> session

Agenda Item 6: Universal Periodic Review; Adoption of the UPR outcome of Greece

23 March 2022 - Delivered by Wissam Al Saliby

Mr. President,

We thank the Government of Greece for engaging in the Universal Periodic Review.

We welcome Greece's acceptance of the recommendation to "Consider alternative classes for the religious education of non-Orthodox students in schools." We call on Greece to take measures to guarantee that options available for religious classes include all the major religious denominations present in Greece. We also call on Greece to make these religious classes optional, including for Orthodox Christians, and renounce the practice of requesting a solemn declaration from students who seek exemption from these classes.

We regret that no State made recommendations to Greece related to Freedom of Religion or Belief, notably the longstanding prohibition of proselytism in Greece in the constitution and legislation. Greek laws foresee prison sentences for anyone engaging in proselytism, defined in very vague terms.<sup>1</sup> These legal provisions are contrary to the right to freedom of religion or belief. It is regrettable that almost 30 years after the condemnation of Greece by the European Court of Human Rights in the Kokkinakis case, the law remains unchanged. Despite being rarely applied, the anti-proselytism law is still in force and was used in August 2013 by the Supreme Criminal Court to condemn a member of the Pentecostal church.

We call on Greece to amend or annul the legal provisions prohibiting proselytism.

Thank you.

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<sup>1</sup> Pursuant to Law no. 1363/1938, as amended by Law no. 1672/1939, Article 4 paragraph 2, "1. Anyone engaging in proselytism shall be liable to imprisonment and a fine (...) 2. By 'proselytism' is meant, in particular, any direct or indirect attempt to intrude on the religious beliefs of a person of a different religious persuasion (heterodox), with the aim of undermining those beliefs, either by any kind of inducement or promise of an inducement or moral support or material assistance, or by fraudulent means or by taking advantage of his inexperience, trust, need, low intellect or naivety."