



**LEGAL
CENTRE
LESVOS**

Press Release regarding the case of M.M. - a 27-year-old woman who attempted to self-immolate at the Kara Tepe camp of Lesvos on February 21, 2021

Mytilene, March 9, 2021 – M.M., a 27-year-old refugee from Afghanistan, who set herself on fire on February 21, was released pending further proceedings, on condition that she will not leave the country.

On February 21, M.M., attempted to take her life by setting herself on fire inside the new Kara Tepe Reception and Identification Centre (RIC) of Lesvos. As a result, she sustained injuries on several parts of her body, including her head, both hands, back and legs and inhaled smoke which caused her to lose consciousness for a short period of time. The residents of the neighboring tents rescued her from the burning tent and extinguished the fire using water bottles and towels before the fire-fighter brigade's arrival at the scene. M.M. was then transferred to the hospital due to the injuries suffered from the fire.

Following the incident M.M. was charged with arson with intent, endangering life and the objects of others, as well as with damage of an object of common utility by means of fire.

M.M. and her family have been living in the RICs of Moria and Kara Tepe for a year and four months, in conditions which amount to inhuman and degrading treatment. In particular, the conditions at Kara Tepe, where the pregnant 27-year-old had to live, raise children and give birth to a newborn, have been marked with extreme lack of hygiene and sanitary infrastructure, as well as with severe weather conditions to name but a few of the problems. The extreme weather conditions, the effects of which have been compounded by the terrible seaside location of the camp and by the lack of adequate infrastructure, have led to flooding of the camp, on multiple occasions, including the flooding of tents.

It should be also noted that the article 58, L.3646/2019, includes pregnant women in the list of vulnerable categories of persons who should receive special reception conditions; therefore M.M., as a pregnant woman, should have been transferred to suitable accommodation.

Vassilis Kerasiotis, Country Director, HIAS Greece: "In the last few years we have seen an increasingly misplaced application of provisions of criminal law on the island of Lesvos, in cases involving asylum seekers and refugees. The case of M.M. is a vivid example of this trend. A mother of 3 underage children who is eight months pregnant, was detained for 5 days and was overcharged after she tried to put an

end to her life, because she could not suffer anymore the conditions she was subjected to in the new camp of Kara Tepe.

Nevertheless, we retain faith in the greek judicial system and we hope that the criminal law will be applied appropriately in this case of an attempted suicide, which cannot but lead to the dismissal of all the charges”.

Tereza Volakaki, Legal Centre Lesvos attorney who represented M.M. in her preliminary hearing: “Pressing criminal charges in response to a suicide attempt appears to be part of the Greek state's broader practice of framing migrants as criminals and threats in order to distract from the state’s own liability for the violent, inhuman and degrading treatment of migrants in Lesvos and other ‘hotspot’ Aegean islands.

Those in solidarity with migrants must continue to publicly denounce the unjust and tragic consequences of this treatment, and support migrants who are trapped on the Greek islands in inhumane conditions which have been denounced for years as a mental health emergency.”

HIAS Greece and Legal Centre Lesvos represent the 27-year-old woman.