Parliamentary Assembly
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Resolution 1555 (2007)[1]

Situation of the inhabitants of the British Sovereign Base Areas of Akrotiri and Dhekelia

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The Parliamentary Assembly stresses the importance it attaches to the non-discriminatory application of the European Convention on Human Rights (ETS No. 5) throughout the territory of all member states.

2. Leaving aside the question of whether the presence of the British Sovereign Base Areas (SBAs) in Cyprus is legitimate, the Assembly considers that the principle of the non-discriminatory application of the Convention must apply to the inhabitants of the SBAs, whose rights should be protected in the same way as those of all other Cypriots.

3. The Assembly commends the United Kingdom for granting the inhabitants of the SBAs the right of individual application to the European Court of Human Rights in 2004. However, it also notes that the Additional Protocol to the Convention has not been extended to the SBAs and that the Cypriot inhabitants of the SBAs enjoy neither the full panoply of rights of Cypriot nationals nor that of nationals of the United Kingdom.

4. It also notes that the British authorities in charge of the administration of the SBAs, by and large, treat the local population with respect.

4.1. Whilst many SBA residents, as well as many Cypriots living in the Republic of Cyprus, have reservations as to the presence on the island of the British military, often perceived as a remnant of colonialism, there have been no specific complaints about the behaviour of representatives of the British military or civilian authorities vis-à-vis the local population.

4.2. Regular contacts between elected representatives of the Cypriot inhabitants of the SBAs and the British authorities have established a continuous dialogue which has enabled both sides to identify and address any practical problems.

4.3. The strong commitment of the SBA authorities to the preservation of the natural environment is documented, inter alia, by the draft Akrotiri Peninsula Environmental Management Plan, and by the activity of the Akrotiri Environmental Education and Information Centre (AEEIC), which performs important monitoring and educational tasks. The current restrictions on property development have spared the SBAs some of the excesses of the rapid expansion of settlements that can be seen in other parts of the southern area of Cyprus, aggravated by the need to rehouse large numbers of refugees from the north of the island quickly following the events of 1974.

5. Despite the efforts made on both sides, a number of problems persist.

1. The inhabitants of Akrotiri village, which is located right at the end of the runway of the British airbase, suffer from the almost unbearable noise of military aircraft taking off and landing. Whilst the British forces strive to avoid aircraft movements during the night, the afternoon rest period in the local kindergarten and church services on Sundays, there are too many exceptions during certain periods.

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1. Text adopted by the Standing Committee, acting on behalf of the Assembly, on 24 May 2007 (seeDoc. 11232, report of the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights, rapporteur: Mr Gross).

2. The inhabitants of Akrotiri village and other localities nearby worry about the potentially detrimental effects on their health of the high-powered “Pluto” antennae built in 2001 in the Western SBA, as well as on that of wild birds on the nearby salt lake. The results of an independent study commissioned by the British and Cypriot authorities, which concluded that health risks were minimal, have not allayed the fears of the inhabitants; they consider that the study came too early to properly reflect longterm effects of exposure to the radiation and doubt its impartiality.

3. The inhabitants of both SBAs complain about restrictions placed by the SBA administration on the use of their properties, whose market value remains depressed compared to other areas of Cyprus due to persisting restrictions on land use. The Assembly therefore welcomes the fact the British authorities have recently engaged in consultations aimed at aligning the planning and zoning rules applied to geographic areas situated in SBAs that are not needed for military purposes with the rules applicable in the Republic of Cyprus. Regrettably, the British authorities have so far defined the boundaries of the land concerned by this measure unilaterally.

4. The inhabitants of both SBAs also complain about the fact that certain European Union subsidies under the Structural Funds are not available to them.

5. Representatives of the inhabitants of the SBAs also complain about a perceived lack of independence of the Sovereign Base Areas Court that is competent to hear disputes, inter alia, between local residents and the British authorities, and criminal cases against inhabitants.

6. The Turkish Cypriot inhabitants of the villages of Pergamos and Pyla situated in the vicinity of the Eastern SBA complain about:

    1. impediments to their freedom of movement, even within their village separated in two;

    2. the difficulties they face in bringing goods from the northern part of Cyprus to their village, even for their personal use

7. perceived discrimination against Turkish Cypriot-owned businesses in the award of outsourcing or privatisation contracts by the British authorities;and raise specific public health concerns of their own.

6. The Assembly therefore invites the British authorities:

1. as regards aircraft traffic noise at Akrotiri:

    1. to consider the possibility of moving the runway of Akrotiri airbase closer to the coast so that aircraft can approach and depart over the sea instead of Akrotiri village;

    2. if the displacement of the runway is not feasible, to fund adequate technical noise protection measures, both in the homes and in the public buildings that are most exposed to aircraft noise; the tolerance criteria and amounts of subsidies for remedial measures should be the same as those applicable to neighbours of airports located in the United Kingdom or elsewhere in Cyprus;

    3. to negotiate with the representatives of the inhabitants of Akrotiri a binding flight schedule, taking into account not only the nightly rest period but also key school and religious service hours. Whilst such a schedule should allow for well-defined exceptions, the inhabitants should be kept informed about the reasons for any exceptions and granted a modest financial compensation for each aircraft movement taking place outside the agreed timetable to be paid into a fund for community projects;

2. as regards the concerns about the detrimental health effects of the antennae at Akrotiri:

    1. to publish the findings of the independent study also in Greek;

    2. to ensure, in collaboration with the Health Ministry of the Republic of Cyprus, adequate and transparent epidemiological follow-up to the existing study, keeping track, in particular, of all cases of cancer occurring in the local population;

3. as regards property development issues:

    1. to continue their consultations with the Government of Cyprus and the elected representatives of the local inhabitants on the content of the new regulations that shall govern property development in the SBAs and to extend these consultations also to the question of the boundaries of the land that shall be governed by the new, more favourable rules;

    2. to pay due attention to the possible need to foresee appropriate mechanisms to protect the present inhabitants of the SBAs and the natural environment from excessive speculative pressures;

3. to phase in the new rules as soon as possible;

4. as regards access to European Union structural funds, to take the necessary steps, jointly with the Government of Cyprus, to ensure that the inhabitants of the SBAs are granted access to these funding sources in the same way as other inhabitants of the Republic of Cyprus;

5. as regards the courts dealing with cases concerning Cypriot inhabitants of the SBAs:

   1. to explain to the population concerned the procedure by which judges are appointed and how their independence from the SBA administration is guaranteed;

   2. to extend the existing possibilities for SBA inhabitants to have cases heard by Cypriot courts instead of the SBA court;

6. as regards the specific complaints of the Turkish Cypriot inhabitants:

   1. in so far as possible, under European Union and United Nations rules and respecting the sovereign rights of the Republic of Cyprus, to facilitate the circulation of the inhabitants of Pergamos and Pyla over the boundaries controlled by the British military, and to enable them to bring goods for their own use from the areas in which the Government of the Republic of Cyprus does not exercise effective control, including by providing the persons concerned with special identification documents designed to speed up controls;

   2. to allow all legally registered companies, including those owned by Turkish Cypriots, to participate on an equal footing in calls for tender for procurement contracts concerning the SBA administration, and to inform companies having submitted tenders without being registered about the procedures enabling them to fulfil legal requirements;

   3. to continue investigating and to follow up specific health concerns raised by the local Turkish community representatives.