

VOICES OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS - CYPRUS

Human Rights Violations Report – Quarter 1
2021-2022



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THE GAP



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Dedicated to those who fight for justice.

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Contributors

Ashraf Saleem	- Team Leader
Maghazi Ahmed	- Team Leader
Lehlohonolo Motsusi	- Team Member
Mykola Syniakov	- Team Member
Nardos Woned	- Team Member
Shahd Abdulsalam	- Team Member
Tayam Abdelazim	- Team Member
Samuel Akoni	- Editor
Emmanuel Achiri	- Reviewer

Preamble

Human rights are one of the pillars upon which modern society rests. On the 10th of December 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly. The document included 30 articles detailing an individual's basic rights and fundamental freedoms and affirming their universal character as inherent, inalienable, and applicable to all human beings. It adopted things such as the right to life, freedom of movement, freedom of association and freedom of speech, and the right to dignified healthcare and life. Since then, several treaties, documents, and laws have been enacted and ratified by many regions and countries in the world, affirming and/or expanding on the declaration, such as the European Convention on Human Rights, which is also applicable in the northern part of Cyprus.

The northern part of Cyprus is the location of this report and the subject of its discussion – its “constitution¹” also affirms the importance of human rights and the equal treatment of all. Article 8 Section 2 quotes “the organs and the administrative authorities of the State are under an obligation to act in conformity with the principle of equality before the law and not to make any discrimination in their actions”. Article 14 similarly contains four different sections that all affirm and state the importance of equal treatment and an honourable and dignified living for all.

International students constitute a significant portion of the society and contribute greatly to its social, cultural, and economic fabric. While year on year, more efforts are directed towards ensuring their equal and just treatment, this remains lacking in many respects and many international students are still discriminated against based on their health status, race, ethnicity, and gender, amongst others, thereby preventing them from enjoying a dignified living based on modern-day human rights standards.

¹ Available at: <https://cutt.ly/zOdr6wh>

Since its inception, Voices of International Students in Cyprus (VOIS Cyprus) has worked tirelessly to ensure a just and harmonious society for all. Human rights have been on the VOIS agenda since day one and it has always strived to ensure they are respected, both inside the organisation and in the local community more generally. Since the beginning of 2021, VOIS embarked on the ambitious project of recording instances of human rights violations, investigating and publishing them in a transparent and organised manner to contribute to this objective. The purpose of this project, under which this report was produced, is transparency: to illustrate the types of cases that VOIS deals with and how it tackles them. The hope is that by highlighting and bringing human rights violations into the public eye in an organised and scientific manner, with data and statistics of every quarter, we can contribute to the betterment of the northern part of Cyprus.

This report will be published in quarterly cycles – in January, April, July, and October – alongside accompanying infographics on VOIS Cyprus' social media pages and website. We urge all those reading this report to help us compile more cases and have access to more information. If you are aware of any cases or have yourself been subject to a human rights violation, please email the case to humanrights@voiscyprus.org. Upon handling the cases brought to our attention, VOIS follows the Human Rights Monitoring Principles which compel our team members to keep all information strictly confidential.

Summary

No	Type	Location	Date
1	Police Abuse	Morphou	29 th October
2	Physical Abuse	Nicosia	2 nd December
3	Health System	Famagusta	24 th October
4	Sex Trafficking	Nicosia	20 th December
5	Domestic Abuse	Famagusta	13 th January
6	Sex Trafficking	Nicosia	14 th January

Human Rights Violations

1 | 29th October – Morphou – Racial & Physical Police Abuse

On the 30th of October 2021, VOIS Cyprus received a complaint to one of its social media accounts that a couple of black students were racially abused and physically assaulted during a party in Morphou, in the northern part of Cyprus, in the evening hours of 29th October.

During a student party being held in the city, attended by numerous locals and international students, the police arrived at the scene responding to a noise complaint they had received. After they arrived, the police are reported to have targeted only the international students present, specifically wanting to arrest them, and letting the locals go, which a couple of the international students present objected to. The situation escalated after one of the police officers called a black student the word “zenci”². The students further objected to this and one of them started recording with their phone, which the police proclaimed was illegal. The situation then turned violent with the police breaking the phone in question, holding one student in a choking position, tackling and arresting the others.

The students were taken to the police station and held in the jail cell for a whole night without any explanation or charge. Afterwards, the police spoke to them and informed them to sign a prepared statement as a condition for their release. Said statement did not mention the police breaking the phone, saying “Zenci”, or being violent. Instead, the statement mentioned that the students were violent and behaved aggressively and that is why they were arrested. The students objected to signing this statement but they were told they will be kept in jail the whole weekend if they do not sign, after which they signed and were released.

After VOIS Cyprus received the complaint, the case was delegated to one of the members to investigate further, after which contact was made with the primary

² “Zenci” is a racist remark used against a black person, it has historical origins in the Ottoman empire and was used to refer to black and Arab slaves.

person who reached out. After a few days of phone calls and texts, it was decided that a trip was needed to gather more information on the case, as well as provide more awareness of it. On 27th November, a member of the VOIS Cyprus team responsible for Human Rights Violations and members of the VOIS media team travelled to Morphou where they took a video and conducted a verbal interview with two of the international students involved in the incident.

As it stands, VOIS Cyprus has dealt with and tried to solve this case using two avenues: first, by raising awareness of such occurrences through the video and this report, and secondly, by offering legal advice to the students. Unfortunately, VOIS Cyprus does not currently possess the financial capacity to pay for lawyer fees in such incidents. However, the organisation often refers such cases to other partner CSOs that are capable of providing legal counselling. The students are still currently processing their legal options and how to move forward.

In this case, the students were subjected to physical abuse in breach of their right to security and health as outlined in Article 3 and Article 25.1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)³. The arrest conditions the students were subjected to similarly contravene Articles 9 and 5 of the UDHR, which state that “No one shall be subjected to *arbitrary arrest*..”⁴ and “No one shall be subjected to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment..”. Similarly, Article 11.1 of the UDHR states that everyone charged with a penal offence has the right to be presumed innocent until proven guilty according to law in a public trial at which they have had all the guarantees necessary for their defence. This right was violated in this case when the students were asked to sign a statement of criminal charges without due process.

³ <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>

⁴ Arbitrary arrest is defined as the arrest or detention of an individual in a case in which there is no likelihood or evidence that they committed a crime against legal statute, or in which there has been no proper due process of law or order.

2 | 2nd December – Nicosia – Physical abuse

On the 2nd of December 2021, VOIS received a social media report from a student that he was shot with a hunting gun in one of the shops in the Mia Milia/Haspolat area of Nicosia. The incident took place on the same day it was reported to us.

The incident happened as follows: a black international student alongside his friend went into a shop to buy groceries when a local man who was sitting stood up and began shouting at them, saying they were making noise. The man walked out of the store pushing the student to the floor, the student then got up and asked why he pushed him when the man pulled out what is believed to be a hunter's gun and shot him twice in the leg. Only one of the shots hit the student, after which he started bleeding (while we received pictorial evidence of the single shot, it has been excluded from this report due to the graphic nature). The man went further on to threaten that he would call the police to arrest the students at which point the students left the shop and went home before complaining to VOIS and other student societies.

After VOIS received this complaint, contact was made with the student to investigate further. VOIS has been following up on the case since then. VOIS Cyprus advised the students to go to the police and make an official report, to which they refused, not wanting to complicate their upcoming travel plans. On the 6th of December, it was learnt that the National Association of Nigerian Students – Turkish Zone is also following up with the injured student. The students also lodged a complaint with the international office of their higher education establishment, where they were told the office would do its best to prevent such incidents from happening again and left it at that. This, even though the students also said that there were witnesses to the incident and it was not the first time it had happened.

The case was dropped at the request of the students involved. However, VOIS Cyprus is still in the process of following up with the market where the incident occurred to the best of its abilities.

The use of a firearm by the civilian towards the student posed a threat to the student's security and severe risk to his health, both of which are fundamental human rights guaranteed under Article 3 and Article 25.1 of the UDHR, respectively.

3 | 24th October – Famagusta - Health system

On the 28th of October 2021, a VOIS Cyprus volunteer complained that he and his brother were undergoing severe mistreatment and healthcare mismanagement.

The mentioned person and his brother were under home quarantine on the 24th of October, 2021 when one of them had a serious stomach ache and other health issues necessitating medical attention. They called the GÜvende Kal⁵ application support line to find out what to do and were told to get permission from the local body responsible for health to leave the house. They called the local body's hotline and received no support as no one on the line was able to speak English. The students then called a doctor who said to take him to the Famagusta public hospital.

At the hospital emergency section, they were refused entry due to the home quarantine bracelet on their hands. After demanding entry, the nurse told them that the condition is not serious and that taking Paracetamol would solve it. After demanding to see a doctor and arguing that Paracetamol would not be enough as one of them was in severe pain, a doctor came and gave them Ibuprofen and Omeprazole, without doing any check-ups. The students went home but the pain

⁵ GÜvende Kal is an application designed to help fight the spread of Covid-19 virus in the northern part of Cyprus.

worsened till the 28th when they finally called an ambulance. The ambulance took them to the state hospital again where they were given a blood test and did a PCR test, which was negative. They were once again prescribed Paracetamol and were told to go home. The students refused and wanted further check-ups, after which they were taken to the pandemic hospital in Nicosia, thinking that they have COVID. In Nicosia, they were again given PCR tests, the results were negative, and they were sent back. On the way back inside the ambulance the health conditions were worsening and the students informed the medical staff to be taken to the Famagusta public hospital.

In the Famagusta hospital, once again their blood was checked and they were given yet another negative PCR. After all, they were given more Paracetamol, vitamins and told to go home.

The students then went to a private hospital where they were once again refused entry due to the bracelet and were threatened with the police. The students then called the pandemic doctor again, after which an ambulance came; they gave the phone to the ambulance staff who spoke to the doctor. The students were put on a drip for an hour and radiology was done to them when they reached the hospital, after which they were told to go home as no doctor was available to see them. The students then went home and the doctor has not responded to any calls since.

Two days later and as the condition continued to worsen, they tried calling an ambulance again when they were informed that those in quarantine only receive Paracetamol and Omeprazole – a new rule that VOIS has never heard of before and could not confirm. The students then went to the hospital by themselves and at the hospital, one of the nurses was shouting at them, telling them that she told the ambulance not to pick them up. The students then asked the nurse if she would take responsibility if something happens, to which she did not respond. The students were given another PCR, blood test, and put on a drip but refused to leave the hospital unless checked properly by an internal doctor, after which they were

forced to leave by the hospital security. The students were later let back inside the hospital, with the ailing student given an injection and prescribed more medications. The student says that he almost collapsed twice during that period.

VOIS Cyprus recorded all of these incidents through phone calls with the affected students and is still currently investigating this case and seeing what possible measures can be taken.

The students in this case were subjected to verbal abuse. They also experienced a breach of their right to seek and receive information per Article 19 of the UDHR, as well as their right to health under Article 25.1.

[4 | 20th December - Nicosia - Sex Trafficking](#)

On the 20th of December, 2020, VOIS representatives were alerted to a case of sex trafficking that was imposed by traffickers claiming they were agents of a higher education establishment in the northern part of Cyprus. The survivor stated that she was introduced to one of the traffickers by her friend in Nigeria. The trafficker reportedly claimed that they were capable of sending the survivor an admission letter before arranging their travel to the northern part of Cyprus.

Upon arrival in the northern part of Cyprus, the survivor's passport was confiscated by the trafficker and she was informed that she was indebted to the trafficker to the tune of One Million Nigerian Naira, which she could pay back by engaging in sex work.

The survivor was given her passport and partial freedom for a day to do a PCR test, at which time she managed to escape from the trafficker with her passport and sought refuge at the “Women's Shelter in Nicosia”⁶.

The survivor stayed in the Women's Shelter while receiving some financial support from VOIS volunteers and legal support from the Human Rights Platform, which eventually facilitated her deportation back to Nigeria on the 14th of January, 2021 at her request.

Sex trafficking is often referred to as modern-day slavery due to the nature of slavery-like practices that prominently manifest in such situations. The existence of servitude and debt bondage involving exploitation and deprivations of liberty render the situation tantamount to slavery in breach of Article 4 of the UDHR. Moreover, sex trafficking poses a threat to the fundamental individual right to life, liberty, and security of person as enshrined in Article 3 of the UDHR and Article 6 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).⁷

5 | 13th January - Famagusta - Domestic Violence

On the 13th of January, 2020, a VOIS representative got in contact with a survivor of domestic violence, who had been subjected to physical violence by her boyfriend in Famagusta. The survivor had sustained head injuries, back pain, and swollen ankles. VOIS representatives were able to separate the survivor from the abuser, preventing further violence. Moreover, a shelter was provided for the survivor and her eventual transportation to the house of a family member with whom she felt

⁶ The “Women’s Shelter in Nicosia” (Kadın Sığınma Evi) is a shelter that was established by the Nicosia Turkish municipality to provide shelter to survivors of Gender-Based Violence.

⁷ <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CCPR.aspx>

safe. The survivor is yet to decide on pressing charges, citing distrust of the police and a continued emotional attachment to her boyfriend.

In this case of domestic violence, the survivor was subjected to physical abuse that threatened her security and affected her health, in contravention of Articles 3 and 25.1 of the UDHR.

6 | 14th January - Nicosia - Sex Trafficking

On the 14th of January, 2020, VOIS Cyprus met with a sex trafficking survivor at the “Women’s Shelter in Nicosia”. The survivor arrived in the northern part of Cyprus in October 2021 and was introduced to the trafficker by a friend. She was forced to participate in sex work activities for two months to pay back her “debts”.

She was trapped in the trafficker’s house for two months and forced to engage in sexual activities with two “clients”. According to the survivor’s testimony, upon communicating her refusal to engage in sexual activities, she was subjected to severe brutality by the trafficker, which included being bitten, lashed on the back, isolated in a locked room, and being deprived of meals. The survivor also stated that numerous other women were also trapped with her in the same situation before she managed to escape.

Upon escaping, the survivor was incapable of retrieving her passport from the trafficker. She is currently staying at the “Women's Shelter” in Nicosia.

This case of sex trafficking involved serious threats on the survivor’s rights to security and health per Articles 3 and 25.1 of the UDHR. In addition, the survivor was also subjected to torture alongside cruel and inhuman treatment by the trafficker, contrary to Article 5 of the UDHR.