



UNHCR

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
Haut Commissariat des Nations Unies pour les réfugiés

Regional Representation for Italy, Albania, Cyprus, Greece,
Malta, Portugal, San Marino, Spain and The Holy See

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4 June 2014

Prot.: *unhcr/mg/43/14*

Dear Mr. Muhammad Altaf, Mr. Salah Ghanim, Mr Asadollah Panahimehr, Ms. Mehrangiz Hematmand

Re: **Your letter dated 2 June 2014**

Thank you for your letter of 2 June 2014. As The High Commissioner's Regional Representative for Southern Europe, I would like to respond to your letter.

I understand and appreciate the challenges you have had to contend with in your efforts to better integrate into the economic, social, cultural and political life of Cyprus, a country that as many others in Europe is unfortunately undergoing a difficult economic period, that of course also affects refugees in the country.

Since the beginning of your protest in October 2013, the UNHCR Office in the Republic of Cyprus has been in regular contact with the authorities to impress upon them the necessity of taking some urgent measures to support the integration of refugees, including the effective facilitation of naturalization as provided for in Article 34 of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. We are grateful that the authorities have expedited the processing of your citizenship applications and hope that you will receive the decisions shortly.

UNHCR will continue to work with the Cypriot asylum authorities to ensure that the integration of refugees receives all the necessary attention. Although refugees in the Republic of Cyprus are by law entitled to the same socio-economic rights as nationals, the exercise of these rights might have become increasingly difficult as a result of the severe financial crisis that resulted in the highest unemployment level of the past decades.

As regards your request for relocation to another country, this is not an activity we normally carry out in the European Union, where we expect recognized refugees to attempt to integrate in their new host country.

To: Mr. Muhammad Altaf
Mr. Salah Ghanim
Mr Asadollah Panahimehr
Ms. Mehrangiz Hematmand

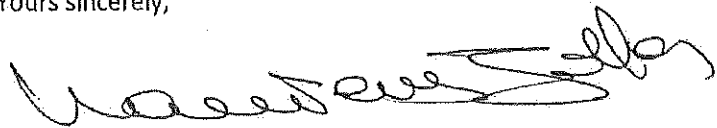
CC: Mr. Socrates Hasikos, Minister of Interior of the Republic of Cyprus
Mr. Damtew Dessalegne, UNHCR Representative in the Republic of Cyprus

In relation to resettlement efforts from countries outside the EU, particularly from the Middle East, Africa and Asia, UNHCR implements a strict prioritization of cases which may eventually be submitted to a resettlement State. Priority for resettlement submissions include refugees who are in danger of forcible return to their country of origin, survivors of torture, refugees with life-threatening medical condition when treatment is unavailable in the country of refuge, children and women at risk who have protection problems particular to their age or gender.

You should also be aware that even in those cases where UNHCR supports resettlement submissions to a country, there can be no guarantee that the applications will be accepted. In fact, there is no obligation on States to accept refugees for resettlement. Whether a refugee may be resettled entirely depends on the admission criteria of the resettlement countries.

I am certain that the Republic of Cyprus, as an EU Member State, is committed to integrate those persons recognized as refugees. I would like to assure you that UNHCR will continue to address with the appropriate government officials refugee protection and integration issues, including effective access to naturalization. At the same time, I would like to urge you to try to redress your grievances through more constructive means than a hunger strike.

Yours sincerely,



Laurens Jolles
UNHCR Representative for Southern Europe