Subject: New hunger strike by stateless Kurdish refugees from Syria

Dear colleagues and friends

As of Monday, 14 May 2018, four members of the Hassan-Janbali family are staging as yet another hunger strike, extended as from today, 21 May, to a thirst strike, in protest against the continuing refusal of the Ministry of Interior to recognise them as refugees and grant them citizenship. The refugee family have been in protest, living in tents, outside the Presidential Palace and the Ministry of Interior for 15 months.

The refugee family are Ajanib (stateless Kurds from Syria), living in Cyprus since 2006. As a result of the Cypriot authorities’ unwillingness to grant them full refugee status, since 2014 the family have mounted a number of protests, staged outside the Ministry of Interior and subsequently outside the Presidential Palace as well. Their first protest from October 2014 to August 2015, along with other Kurdish refugees, ended when one family member was granted Cypriot citizenship and the Minister of Interior proposed that the remaining family members submitted citizenship applications one year from then, when they would meet the residence time requirements for citizenship.

Although these applications were submitted as required, on 27/3/2017, the Ministry of Interior rejected them collectively rather than individually as provided by national and international legal instruments, on totally unjustified and arbitrary grounds. At the same time, however, the Ministry admitted that the family were *“in effect enclaved, without passports and without any perspective for better conditions”*. As conveyed to the family by the UNHCR, the former Minister of Interior admitted to the UNHCR Director that this decision had been incorrect and he had given directions for the review of the applications.

As the present Minister of Interior refused to take on his predecessor’s pledge, on 7 April 2017, the family was inevitably led to as yet another protest, this time outside the Presidential Palace, appealing for the President’s intervention. On 6 June 2017, their protest escalated with a 67-day hunger strike by two family members, which was suspended on 11 August 2017 as a sign of good will in response to promises of the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Interior that their applications would be reviewed.

However, ten months afterwards, these promises are still not realised and the Minister of Interior maintains his intransigence and is in effect punishing the family for exercising their inalienable and legally protected rights to peaceful assembly and protest. The Minister actually stated that *“their protest constitutes an abuse of Cyprus’ democratic system [and] … if they protested in their country they would be have been killed”!* And this, despite the support lent to the family’s claims and the solidarity with the protesting family by various bodies and agencies, such as the Chair of the Parliamentary Committee on Internal Affairs, the Commissioner for Children’s Rights, the UNHCR in Cyprus, national NGOs and political parties, as well as society at large.

With this latest hunger and thirst strike, KISA is launching a wider campaign of solidarity, with a petition and letters to the Cypriot authorities, in order to put an end to the family’s life-threatening protest and enable them to access their rights to citizenship and human decency.

More details about the family’s protest, petition and the proposed letter can be found here.

For coordination reasons, we kindly ask you to copy to us any activities / actions taken towards this issue.

With our sincere appreciation and warmest regards