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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Note verbale dated 28 June 2012 from the Permanent Mission of Greece to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva addressed to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

The Permanent Mission of Greece to the United Nations Office at Geneva and other international organizations in Switzerland presents its compliments to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, and has the honour to provide herewith the comments of the Government of Greece in relation to the written statement dated 11 June 2012 and submitted by the “Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe”, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status (A/HRC/20/NGO/47).

The Permanent Mission of Greece kindly requests the Office of the High Commissioner to circulate the attached text* as a document of the twentieth session of the Human Rights Council, under agenda item 3.

* Circulated in an annex, reproduced as received.

Annex

[English only]

We regret that the NGO “ Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe”, continues its orchestrated campaign to raise, on every opportunity, issues pertaining to the Muslim Minority in Thrace- Greece in a tendentious and biased manner, attempting to put forward erroneous and distorted views of the situation of the minority, totally unrelated with the facts on the ground

These tactics smack of political expediencies or other agendas and do not constitute well meaning and constructive criticism which Greece always welcomes

With regard to the written statement submitted by the above mentioned NGO in the framework of the 20th Session of the Human Rights Council under Agenda item 3 (Geneva, 18.06-06.07.2012), Greece would like to raise the following points:

With regard to the representation of Muslim women of the minority to the labor market and to the political system, there is definitely room for improvement. Existing shortcomings in this respect, can be attributed mostly to the traditions, customs and perceptions for the role of women in the particular social/religious group they belong to and less to other reasons such as the current economic crisis in Greece or the relatively lower level of participation of women in the political-economic life of the country compared to men.

However, it is encouraging that the leader of the political party “Proto Vima Gia Tin Isotita”, which claims to represent the interests of the Muslim minority, is a woman, currently a member of the Municipal Council of the city of Komotini. Muslim women are represented also in the local government (municipalities) in the towns of Myki and Arriana, while the largest and most active NGO of the minority (PEKEM) has women in key positions.

In no case there is any kind of state discrimination against Muslim women (or men) because of their sex or religion as the written statement implies.

The Greek state not only does not discriminate against Muslim women but on the contrary, has taken and continues to take affirmative action to improve their better integration into all aspects of economic, social and political life, both at regional and national level.

In that respect, special quotas for the benefit of all minority members have been introduced.¹ Muslim women, in particular, are beneficiaries of broader gender equality policies and do actively participate in relevant programmes implemented by state authorities or civil society and NGO's.

It should be noted that Muslim women in Thrace, as everywhere in Greece, are free to dress according to their traditions and wear the headscarf. This is a possibility that is not an option even in some Muslim countries

Greece will continue to seek further ways and means to meet the needs of the members of the Muslim minority and enhance their progress, prosperity and well – being.

¹ a 0.5% quota for the admission to Universities and Higher Technical Educational Institutes / Institutions of students belonging to the Muslim minority as well as a 0,5 0/00 quota to the state exam system for civil service in favor of the members of the Muslim minority in Thrace were introduced.