



The prospects of a significant number of Greeks securing an adequate standard of living in line with international human rights standards have been compromised by bailout conditions imposed by Greece's international lenders, United Nations Independent Expert on foreign debt and human rights, Cephias Lumina, warned.

"More than ten per cent of the population in Greece now lives in extreme poverty, and unemployment amongst youth has reached an unprecedented rate of 59.3 per cent," the human rights expert said.

He was speaking at the end of a week-long mission to Greece to assess the impact of the country's economic crisis and austerity measures on the capacity of the Government to realize all human rights, particularly economic, social and cultural rights.

In order to avoid default, Greece agreed in 2010 with the European Commission, the European Central Bank, and the International Monetary Fund to implement radical cuts in Government expenditure in return for a bailout loan. It also adopted a structural reform programme aimed at

reducing the country's fiscal deficit and returning the economy to growth. The Greek economy has, however, shrunk by about 25 per cent and continues in recession.

"Greece remains the only country in the Eurozone where a comprehensive social assistance scheme serving as a social safety net of last resort is missing," Mr. Lumina said.

The austerity programme, in his view, was being implemented in the context of a social protection system ill-equipped to absorb the shock of unemployment, salary cuts and tax increases.

The Independent Expert warned that the public health system was increasingly inaccessible, in particular for poor citizens and marginalized groups. "Nearly one third of the Greek population is without public health insurance, mainly due to prolonged unemployment," he added.

The only option for increasing numbers of Greeks was health care provided by community clinics, free of charge. "Run by volunteers, the clinics are a laudable expression of solidarity within the Greek society," Mr. Lumina said. "However," he added, "it is a primary obligation of the State to ensure access to basic health care for all without any discrimination."

The expert said privatization should be undertaken cautiously and with sensitivity to the rights of the population, noting that utilities which provide essential public services such as water and energy are among the businesses targeted for privatization to reduce the public debt. "The privatization will likely entail further increases of user fees for the basic services," he said.

Mr. Lumina also expressed concern at the significant increase in attacks on foreigners by extremist groups. "It appears that the economic crisis has magnified a problem that has existed for several years," he noted.

The authorities needed to send a strong message that such criminal acts would not be tolerated, by strengthening the legal and institutional framework for combating them, he said.

Mr. Lumina welcomed the establishment of 70 anti-racist police units and the appointment of a Special Prosecutor responsible for the investigation of racist crimes "as an important step to combat such incidents".

He urged the Greek Government and its creditors to adopt a human rights-based approach to designing and implementing economic reform. "These policies must be consistent with the obligations for the promotion of human rights that the country has assumed through ratification of core international human rights instruments," he said.

"Development cannot be sustainable if human rights are not sufficiently taken into account. Ensuring the full participation of all segments of society in decision-making processes, enhancing efforts to reduce inequality, and respecting, promoting and protecting all human rights are critical to sustainable development," he concluded.

During his first visit to Greece from 22-26 April 2013, the expert met with senior Government officials, including representatives of various Ministries and members of Parliament. He also held meetings with representatives of international organizations, national human rights bodies and civil society, as well as persons affected by the economic crisis.

His final findings and his recommendations will be presented in a comprehensive report to the UN Human Rights Council in March 2014.

(*) [Read the full end-of mission statement by the Independent Expert](#)

Additional Information:

Cephas Lumina is an Advocate of the High Court for Zambia and an Extra-Ordinary Professor of Human Rights Law at the University of Pretoria. He has extensive experience in human rights and holds a PhD in international human rights from Griffith University. He was appointed Independent Expert on the effects of foreign debt and other related international financial obligations of States on the full enjoyment of all human rights, particularly economic, social and

cultural rights by the United Nations Human Rights Council in 2008. He is independent from any government or organization and serves in his individual capacity. The mandate covers all countries.

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