

For Immediate Release

July 10, 2024

Acknowledgment of Racist Motive in the Case of the Events at Sappho Square

Mytilene, Greece – Hias Greece, representing the victims, expresses its satisfaction with the conviction by the Three-Member Misdemeanors Court of Mytilene regarding the racist attack against refugees, that were peacefully demonstrating in Sappho Square on April 22, 2018. Despite unprecedented delays during the pre-trial phase, which led to a gradual downgrading of the charges, Mytilene Court recognized a racist motive in the criminal acts for the first time.

On the afternoon of Tuesday, July 9, four individuals were found guilty by the Three-Member Misdemeanor Court of Mytilene for causing dangerous bodily harm with a racist motive to the refugees, and for causing dangerous bodily harm without a racist motive to police officers and other bystanders. They were also found guilty of aggravated disturbance of public peace. Two of them were additionally found guilty of threatening the refugees with a racist motive. The first two were sentenced to 5 years and nine months in prison, while the other two were sentenced to 6 years in prison. Seventeen defendants were found guilty of simple disturbance of public peace and were sentenced to 1 year in prison, except for one who was sentenced to 9 months. Four individuals were acquitted of all charges, while one of the accused had passed away, ending any prosecution. The sentences are suspended for 3 years and are redeemable at 5 euros per day. According to information, the defendants will appeal the decision.

It should be reminded that on April 22, 2018, following the customary Sunday flag-lowering ceremony, approximately 150 individuals attacked more than 200 refugees, including children, who had peacefully gathered in Sappho Square. The gathered individuals in the square were protesting against the living conditions and inadequate medical care at the Moria Reception and Identification Center, following the death of their compatriot. That night, the attackers menacingly surrounded the gathered refugees, throwing stones, bottles, and firecrackers at them, while simultaneously threatening and insulting them with offensive racist remarks until 5 a.m. when the incidents ended.

The case on trial may not reflect the full extent of the unprovoked and organized violence that took place against the refugees and their families; however, it sends a strong message against impunity: instances of vigilante groups 'taking the law into their own hands' are unacceptable in a lawful state.

Press Release



Welcome the stranger.
Protect the refugee.

The choice of victims was clearly based on their cultural characteristics (religion, nationality) with the aim of expelling them from the square by any means and causing them serious bodily harm. However, everyone within Greek territory, whether Greek or foreign, enjoys absolute protection of life and honor, according to the Greek Constitution, without discrimination.

The recognition of the racist crime and its increased penal disapproval highlights the necessity of protecting both the victim and the society as a whole.

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About HIAS

HIAS is the global Jewish nonprofit that provides critical services to refugees, asylum seekers and other displaced people in 23 countries around the world. Learn more at [@HIASrefugees](#), [Facebook](#) and hias.org.