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PUBLIC STATEMENT

Greece

Possible adoption of Eva Androutsopoulou as prisoner of conscience

Amnesty International will adopt Eva Androutsopoulou as a prisoner of conscience and will call for her immediate and unconditional release should she be imprisoned after her trial tomorrow, the human rights organization said in a letter to the Greek Government today.

Eva Androutsopoulou is accused of “*making frequent references...to Buddhism and to the religious beliefs of the Orient*” during a German language class she gave at a private school in Komotini, northern Greece, in May 1995.

The charges against Eva Androutsopoulou have been brought under Article 4 of Law 1363/1938, which makes it an offence to “*attempt directly or indirectly to intrude on the religious beliefs of a person of a different religious persuasion...with the aim of undermining those beliefs*”. If found guilty, Eva Androutsopoulou, who is not herself a Buddhist, faces a term of imprisonment of between 10 days and five years, and a fine of between 1,000 and 50,000 drachmas.

Amnesty International believes that the prosecution of Eva Androutsopoulou on charges of proselytism represents a violation of Article 9 of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (European Convention) and Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, both of which guarantee the right to “freedom of thought, conscience and religion”.

The trial of Eva Androutsopoulou is the first trial for proselytism since the European Court of Human Rights delivered its judgment on the Kokkinakis case in May 1993. The European Court ruled that the conviction of Jehovah’s Witness Minos Kokkinakis for attempting to convert an Orthodox Christian woman during a visit to her home violated Article 9 of the European Convention.
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