

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## Public Statement

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### Malta: Attacks against anti-racists must end

Amnesty International is concerned that a pattern of arson attacks is taking place against persons and organizations which have spoken out against racism in Malta. Amnesty International calls on the Maltese authorities to take effective steps to protect the lives and safety of those at risk of such attacks and to bring those responsible for the attacks to justice. The organization also urges the government to make combating racism and xenophobia a top priority for governmental action, in the short as well as in the long term.

In Malta, the Jesuit Community has taken a pro-active role in speaking out against racism and in defending the human rights of migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers. In November 2005, two cars belonging to a Jesuit Community resident at Dar Manuel Magri in Imsida were set alight. In early March 2006, the front door of poet's house was subject to an arson attack just a few days after he launched a book containing poetry which promoted tolerance and refugee rights. On 13 March, seven cars belonging to the Jesuit Community were burnt down during the night, just a few days after the launch of the Report on Racism and Xenophobia in Malta by the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC). The Jesuit Community is EUMC's main contact (focal point) in Malta. On 11 April a car, belonging to a lawyer working with the Jesuit Refugee Service, was destroyed.

On 3 May, the front door of the house of the editor of the Maltese weekly *Malta Today* was torched by arsonists. The editor had written an editorial on racism and immigration in the period immediately preceding the attack.

On 13 May, the home of a journalist from the Maltese daily *The Malta Independent* who had spoken out against the extreme right and written articles on issues relating to racism and immigration was attacked. Arsonists set ablaze five tyres filled with petrol which were placed against a back door to her house. A layer of smashed glass and petrol had been spread on the road in front of the house, presumably in order to obstruct any attempt by the family to flee, or for help to arrive. The attack took place between 2.30am and 3am.

In late May 2006, a draft Bill proposing amendments to the Criminal Code was presented. The draft Bill outlined crimes of a racial nature as including not just those perpetrated against individuals on the basis of colour or creed, but also crimes committed against a person assisting those of different beliefs or colour. The draft Bill also stated that if an arson attack had racist motives, this should be considered an aggravating circumstance.

It seems that the targets for the attacks are persons or organizations who have actively worked to protect the human rights of migrants and refugees, or who have publicly spoken out against racist and discriminatory attitudes and actions. Amnesty International is concerned that these attacks occur in a

context of growing racist sentiments in Malta among non-state actors, and that racist speech and attacks are finding increasing amounts of legitimacy among the Maltese population.

**In light of this, Amnesty International calls on the Maltese authorities to:**

act with due diligence to provide effective protection to anti-racism campaigners who face threats to their lives and safety. Such measures should include, where necessary, special measures of protection;

ensure that thorough and impartial investigations are carried out into such attacks, threats of such attacks, and other harassment of anti-racism campaigners, and that anyone reasonably suspected of a crime in connection with the targeting of anti-racism campaigners be prosecuted in line with international standards;

design and implement a national action plan against racism which actively includes as many parts of civil society as possible, including migrant communities;

make combating racism and xenophobia a top priority for governmental action, both in the short and the long term;

ensure that anyone reasonably suspected of a crime in connection with the targeting of anti-racism campaigners be prosecuted in line with international standards;

fulfil their responsibility to ensure the safety and security of all human rights defenders as set out in the UN Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.