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**Greece: Human Rights Defenders on trial for baseless charges for assisting people on the move**

On 4 December 2025, 24 human rights defenders, including **Seán Binder** and **Athanasios (Nassos) Karakitsos**, will appear before the Mytilene Court of Appeals, on the island of Lesvos. This comes seven years after their initial arrests. The human rights defenders are facing felony charges of 'membership of a criminal organisation', 'facilitation of the entry of third country nationals into the country', and 'money laundering'. The charges stem from work carried out by the defenders in Greece between 2016 and 2018, where they assisted people on the move whose lives were at risk while trying to reach safety to the island of Lesvos. If convicted, they face up to 20 years of imprisonment.

Seán Binder and Athanasios (Nassos) Karakitsos are migrant rights defenders who worked with Emergency Response Center International (ERCI) between 2016 and 2018. The humanitarian work carried out by ERCI was extensive, and included helping more than 1000 people reach safety, organising workshops and swimming classes for migrant children in the Kara Tepe camp, and providing residents in the Moria camp with medical assistance. ERCI was registered as a non-governmental organisation and regularly cooperated with Greek authorities, including with the Greek Coast Guard on rescue operations. The organisation was dissolved after the criminalisation of its members and volunteers.

In September 2023, the Supreme Court upheld the Court of Appeals' decision, delivered on 13 January 2023, to dismiss four misdemeanour charges of 'forgery', 'espionage', 'possession of unlicensed radio' and 'infringement of state secrets' faced by Seán Binder and seven other non-Greek speaking defenders. This was due to procedural flaws, including key documents, such as the indictments, having not been translated for the accused. In January 2024, the remaining sixteen human rights defenders, including Athanasios (Nassos) Karakitsos, were acquitted of the same charges.

On 21 August 2018, Lesvos Police arrested Seán Binder after he attended the police station voluntarily, having learned that another human rights defender had been arrested earlier that day. In the following days, they also arrested Athanasios (Nassos) Karakitsos, the field director of ERCI at the time. The human rights defenders were kept in pre-trial detention for more than one hundred days, accused of 'people smuggling', 'money laundering', 'espionage', and 'membership of a criminal organisation.' In December 2018, the human rights defenders were conditionally released on bail.

The upcoming trial is the second court case since 2018 initiated against the 24 human rights defenders based on their work, aiding, assisting and saving the lives of migrants and refugees, who were trapped in the Aegean Sea between Türkiye and Greece.

Front Line Defenders remains deeply concerned about the ongoing criminal prosecution of the 24 human rights defenders, including Seán Binder and Athanasios (Nassos) Karakitsos, as it believes it is solely linked to their peaceful and legitimate human rights work in which they sought to protect the rights of people on the move, including their right to life. Front Line Defenders are also

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concerned about the significant impact that the prolonged criminalisaton continues to have on the well-being of the human rights defenders and their ability to plan a stable future, after seven years.

**Front Line Defenders calls on the authorities in Greece to:**

1. Immediately and unconditionally drop all charges against Seán Binder and Athanasios (Nassos) Karakitsos, and the other 22 human rights defenders who are also on trial;

2. Cease the criminalisation of human rights defenders who peacefully defend the rights of the migrants and refugees, including the humanitarian assistance to save the lives of people stranded at the marine and land borders;

3. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Greece are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions, including judicial harassment.

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