



PANÉPIROTIC FEDERATION OF AUSTRALIA
14 KELVIN CLOSE, NIDDRIE VIC 3042



10 August 2023

The Honourable Penny Wong
Minister for Foreign Affairs
By email: foreign.minister@dfat.gov.au

Dear Minister,

Re: Arrest and Incarceration of Mr Fredi Beleri, mayor-elect of Himara, Albania

We advise that we are an organisation based in Melbourne which represents Australians of ethnic Greek descent, who come from the region of Northern Epirus, which is a part of Southern Albania. This is a region in which there resides a sizeable indigenous Greek minority.

We write expressing our concern at the recent arrest of ethnic Greek mayor-elect of the town of Himara, Fredi Beleri, who was arrested on the eve of the municipal elections (12 May 2023) and is currently incarcerated pending trial, on trumped up charges of vote buying.

We draw your attention to the fact that:

- (a) There is a sizeable Greek minority in the region of Himara, the existence of which is not officially recognised by the Albanian government;
- (b) Consequently, government intervention in the electoral process in the region is common, has historically been characterised by state sponsored violence and ballot box theft.
- (c) Fredi Beleri has been the subject of televised attacks and threats made against him by the Prime Minister of Albania, Mr Edi Rama;
- (d) No evidence has been provided to justify the arrest and continuing pre-trial incarceration of Fredi Beleri;
- (e) The government of Greece has condemned the arrest and incarceration of Fredi Beleri and has announced that it will veto Albania's EU accession process until such time as the rule of law is adhered to in the case of Fredi Beleri.

We note that in these circumstances, the arrest and continuing pre-trial incarceration of Fredi Beleri appear to have been motivated by political purposes, in contravention of Albanian

electoral law and the European Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities.

We are proud of the fact that our country is at the forefront of the campaign to preserve and institute democracy and respect for human rights throughout the world. We therefore request that our Government make the requisite representations to the Albanian Government seeking:

- (a) That the rule of law is adhered to in the conduct of elections in Albania;
- (b) That the rights of ethnic minorities be respected in Albania;
- (c) That Fredi Beleri be released from incarceration pending trial;
- (d) That any proceeding brought against Fredi Beleri be conducted according to the rule of law.

We look forward to your early response.



Dean Kalimniou
Secretary.

