

Athens, 10 June 2010

DEPARTMENT OF STATE – CITIZEN RELATIONS
Special Report Summary:

“PROCEDURES FOR GRANTING AID TO FIRE VICTIMS IN THE SUMMER OF 2007”

In the special report entitled **“Procedures for granting aid to fire victims in the summer of 2007”**, the Ombudsman points out that the operation of the administration was severely tested during the procedure for granting state financial aid. The Ombudsman has established that operational weaknesses of the administration, which are known to exist under normal conditions, inevitably worsen during periods of crisis, when state support is more necessary.

More specifically, when requests were submitted and aid was paid, citizens were essentially asked to decide for themselves whether their claims were eligible, with the final decision being made by the administration at a later stage. This procedure was chosen so that the immediate consequences of the fires could be remedied as soon as possible. However, citizens were not clearly and accurately informed about the consequences and procedures for recovering amounts unduly paid.

The Ombudsman emphasises that providing information to citizens should not be regarded as a bureaucratic burden, either by the administration that does the informing or by the citizens who it is supposed to help. The pertinent state services’ practice of passing the obligation to provide timely and reliable information, to the already burdened citizens, is essentially an abdication of the administration’s obligations towards its citizens.

The Ombudsman points out, once again, the problem of identifying permanent residents and the manner in which permanent residency is determined.

The Ombudsman also stresses the fact that the ever increasing recourse of the administration to third parties (in this case banks) acting as intermediaries in its relations with citizens, should provide guarantees whereby errors committed by intermediaries do not result in a weakening of citizens’ rights, but hold accountable those who are actually responsible.

Finally, the procedure for supporting victims of similar disasters should be rationalised and a framework for action should be formulated; this should include the emergency measures required on each occasion. In this way, the need to search for *ad hoc* solutions, in conditions where the administration is required to act under pressure, will be minimised.