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# HAMBASTEGI

PAPER OF THE INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF IRANIAN REFUGEES

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# 103

May 14, 2001

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## Several Successes

In the past week, three campaigns initiated by the IFIR to stop the deportation of Iranian asylum seekers from Turkey, Germany and Greece were successful.

In Turkey, Parvin and Eghbal Tabeie whose case file had been closed by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and

were facing deportation to Iran were granted resettlement by the Canadian government. IFIR had spent months advocating on their behalf.

In Greece, two of the three remaining detained Iranian asylum seekers were recognised as refugees. IFIR's campaign will continue until all three are released from

prison where they were held after being arrested for protesting against the UNHCR's policies in Greece.

In Germany, the IFIR-German Branch's campaign to free Helen Moosavi Mobarekeh, an Iranian woman asylum seeker fleeing stoning to death, who was detained pending deportation,

succeeded.

The lives of several asylum seekers in three different countries, all on the verge of being brutally repressed, were saved. These small victories are the result of the efforts of all those who supported and joined IFIR's campaigns on their behalf.

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## Woman's Deportation to Stoning Stopped

Last week, the IFIR-German Branch's campaign succeeded in obtaining the release of Helen Moosavi Mobarekeh from detention where she was being held pending deportation to Iran.

On April 23, Mobarekeh, an Iranian asylum seeker, who fled Iran to Germany to escape death by stoning for having a voluntary sexual

issuance of a deportation order. She was transferred to a prison housing those awaiting deportation.

Via telephone on April 30, Mobarekeh revealed that she had been forced to sign a form for the issuance of the Islamic Republic of Iran's travel documents facilitating her deportation to Iran. She was then transferred to solitary confinement and went on hunger strike. IFIR

activists contacted Mobarekeh and convinced her to end her hunger strike (seen as a negative form of resistance in such situations causing harm to the refugee) and focus on a campaign of positive resistance to overturn her deportation order.

On May 4, IFIR-Germany organised a picket outside the prison where Mobarekeh was held and protested against the German government's policy of refusing asylum to the victims of persecution. An IFIR activist and a representative from an anti racist organisation met with

Mobarekeh and conducted an interview with her. The text of the interview was sent to all media outlets in Hanover. A petition protesting Mobarekeh's deportation was also sent out to 300 members of the German parliament. Furthermore, IFIR-German branch sent a letter condemning the German government's forcible veiling of Mobarekeh to meet the Iranian government's requirements for the issuance of a travel document. Last week, Mobarekeh was released from prison. IFIR's campaign will continue until she obtains protection.

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## Iranians Protest Swedish Policies

Several months ago, asylum seekers in a number of camps held sit-ins to demand their right to asylum and the Swedish government's deeming of Iran as an unsafe country. They warned that they would take additional steps should their demands not be addressed.

As a result of the Swedish government's inaction and to highlight their plight, Iranian asylum seekers have begun another series of sit-ins to protest the Swedish government's inhuman asylum policies. Sit-ins have already been organized in

Gimo and Malmo. The IFIR -Sweden Branch is actively engaged in these sit-ins and is determined to organise and mobilise Iranian asylum seekers and progressive people and organizations in their defense and against the brutal Swedish asylum system.

**Next Issue:**

**Monday,  
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## Online Demonstration against Deportation

This is a call to massively and simultaneously block the entrance to the website of Lufthansa Airlines, in protest to its business of deporting large numbers of asylum seekers back to persecution. The protest will be held in early summer of 2001.

How will this protest work? Well, just like a sit-in, but using the net. If a lot of people log themselves into the website of Lufthansa at the same time, the entrance to this publicly displayed webpage can be blocked due to overload.

Is it really that simple? Of course, within limits. The company has an enormous computer capacity to serve its presence in the net and is therefore able to "digest" a great amount of requests at the same time. That is why we will provide a user-friendly protest-software, which will make it possible to keep the computers of Lufthansa busy by using an automatic inquiry. Our aim is to show massive and international criticism of the Lufthansa Airlines deportation business.

For more information, contact: [online-demo@gmx.net](mailto:online-demo@gmx.net) (or call) 0177-5029083.

<http://go.to/online-demo>

**STOP DEPORTATION NOW!**

# International Refugee News

## \* Arrests

In the biggest 'catch' of its kind in nine years, 57 'illegal' immigrants including eight women, Romanian border police apprehended 13 children and 36 men from Afghanistan, China and Sierra Leone as they attempted to illegally cross the border into Hungary. (The Associated Press, May 9, 2001)

British police were today questioning suspected 'illegal' immigrants after a yacht from Lithuania docked at an east coast port. Nine men and four women were found in what are described as fairly cramped conditions. "Five men were arrested for the facilitation of 'illegal' entry into the UK and are in custody at Ipswich police station. "Four women and two men were arrested for 'illegal' entry into the UK and are in custody at Felixstowe." (Press Association (U.K.), May 7, 2001)

Turkish security forces captured 55 'illegal' immigrants in the eastern province of Agri as nearly 500 others detained earlier at sea remained in custody. The 55 'illegals,' all of them Iraqi nationals, were detained when police stopped a truck on a highway in Agri and discovered them. Meanwhile nearly 500 'illegal' immigrants, who were captured on a cargo ship in the Sea of Marmara, remained in custody in the town of Gebze,

several kilometers (miles) southeast of Istanbul. Press reports said they included nationals of Turkey, Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, Lebanon, Syria and Sudan. (Agence France Presse, May 6, 2001)

Five suspected 'illegal' immigrants - 34 males, 22 females and 12 children aged under 10 - had to be 'rescued' by Australian Customs after the boat they were travelling in ran aground off Western Australia's far north coast. (The Australian Associated Press, May 6, 2001)

Hungarian border patrols arrested 34 border violators and two human smugglers along the Ukrainian and Romanian borders in Szabolcs-Szatmar-Bereg County (NE Hungary) over the weekend. (Hungarian News Agency (MTI), May 4, 2001)

A boat carrying 185 'illegal' immigrants from Afghanistan on their way to Australia, as drifted ashore in Indonesia's Sumbawa Island. (Agence France Presse, May 3, 2001)

British police and immigration officers detained more than 20 suspected 'illegal' immigrants in Southampton when they stopped vehicles. (Press Association (U.K.), May 2, 2001)

The police chiefs of Malaysia and Thailand resolved to step up border patrols between the two countries to

stem firearms smuggling and 'illegal' immigrants. 'Illegal' immigrants from Myanmar, Nepal and Bangladesh were making their way to Malaysia through Thailand. (The Associated Press, May 2, 2001)

A fishing boat carrying 23 'illegal' immigrants from Iraq has been intercepted off Cyprus and turned away. The UN refugee agency does not approve of intercepting the boats and turning them away. The agency believes the practice deprives possible refugees of a chance of a fair asylum hearing. (Reuters, May 1, 2001)

## \* Deaths

Three 'illegal' immigrants from Somalia died and 10 others were injured when a minibus carrying them from Bucharest to the Hungary-Romania border crashed into a river in northwestern Romania. (Agence France Presse, May 7, 2001)

A 27-year-old Nigerian man, held for months in a detention centre in Switzerland after being refused asylum, died Tuesday after a struggle with police ordered to forcibly repatriate him. Police said the man, who was not identified, 'resisted' attempts by the two officers to handcuff him prior to escorting him to Zurich airport. After finally closing the cuffs, the officers found the Nigerian was not moving or breathing. The Nigerian

had been detained in the centre since March, when he refused to voluntarily return to Nigeria after having his asylum request turned down. (Agence France Presse, May 1, 2001)

## \* Deportation

Spanish Police and coast guard agents detained another 79 Africans as a wave of 'illegal' immigration to Europe's southern tip went into a second day. The detentions brought the total of migrants in custody this week to 248, and police had begun deportation procedures for the group. (The Associated Press, May 9, 2001)

A Sri Lankan refugee who fled his homeland after being hung from his thumbs, nearly suffocated, shackled and whipped by Tamil rebels is challenging an order by Hong Kong Secretary of Security to deport him. The 27-year-old refugee, identified only as Prabakar, was on a transit stop between Bangkok and Manila on January 4, 1999, when he was searched and arrested by Hong Kong immigration officers after they found him carrying a fake Canadian passport. He was jailed for six weeks with a recommendation he be deported back to Sri Lanka, despite his pleas he would be persecuted. However, for the next 11 months, while Prabakar was held in Victoria Prison awaiting answers on his requests for refugee sta-

tus, the government held fast, maintaining "his presence in Hong Kong is undesirable". It only changed its mind, in December 1999, after the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), following three previous rejections, granted Prabakar full refugee status and had him released. Even then, the government insisted that Prabakar should be deported to another country for resettlement. (Hong Kong iMail, May 8, 2001)

Iran admitted publicly for the first time yesterday that a fresh wave of 200,000 Afghan refugees had crossed its borders in recent months but warned the international community it could deport many if no aid was given. Western aid workers said Iran was already deporting several hundred a day through its Dogharoun border crossing while others were being detained and placed in camps. Hassanali Ebrahimi, the senior Iranian official in charge of refugees, disclosed the figure of 200,000 to the Financial Times during a visit to the border province of Khorasan by Ruud Lubbers, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. Hundreds of refugees continue to cross the 1,000km border with Iran each week. (The Financial Times (U.K.), May 1, 2001)

#### **\* Detention**

'Illegal' immigrants went on strike in the Port Hedland detention centre this week, seeking improved payment and fewer hours working in

the facility's kitchen. In exchange for work, detainees are given coupons. The asylum seekers had been refusing to work in a bid to have their hours reduced from 12 to eight - or get overtime after eight hours. They also wanted work for everyone in the centre who wanted it, not just those selected by Australasian Correctional Management (ACM). He said detainees had gone on strike last month and were given a pay rise approximately equivalent to \$8 an hour, but had recently gone on strike again and achieved the equivalent of \$10 an hour. (The Australian Associated Press, May 10, 2001)

A prestigious British medical journal has accused Australia of abusing refugees by jailing them in remote detention centres like Woomera while their applications for asylum are heard. The Lancet said Australia had spent much time and money on recreating a climate of fear and persecution in its detention centres which could leave refugees, many of whom had already been tortured and abused in their home countries, permanently psychologically scarred. The journal said psychological distress among inmates was reflected in suicide attempts, acts of mass violence, group breakouts, rioting, the burning of facilities, and sporadic hunger strikes - most of which have occurred at Australian centres. (The Australian Associated Press, May 4, 2001)

All parties at the Welsh Assembly attacked the UK Home Office policy of detaining asylum seekers in prison. (Press Association (U.K.), May 3, 2001)

During the first four months of 2001 alone, more 'illegal' immigrants have been detained in Austria than during the whole of 1995. The number of detentions has steadily increased over the past months from 1 to 29 April 871 persons were detained. (Der Standard, Vienna (via BBC), May 1, 2001)

Former prime minister Malcolm Fraser called for a judicial inquiry into Australia's treatment of refugees and asylum seekers. Fraser said Australia was failing to fulfil its international obligations in its treatment of refugees. (The Australian Associated Press, May 2, 2001)

The Irish Government's legal provisions for asylum-seekers fell seriously short of international law on human rights, an audit by Amnesty International Irish Section has stated. In the audit, Amnesty proposed the State refrained from detaining asylum-seekers on grounds, which the organisation considered did not comply with the European Convention on Human Rights. (The Irish Times, May 1, 2001)

#### **\* Living Conditions**

The government's policy of dispersing asylum seekers around Britain is in "complete meltdown", with thousands refusing to leave Lon-

don or returning to the capital immediately after they have been sent elsewhere. In the 12 months since the compulsory dispersal system was introduced, about 14,000 asylum seekers have not shown up for coaches supposed to take them to new locations. (The Times (of London), April 29, 2001)

#### **\* Laws / Legislation**

The South African home affairs department capitulated in a Pretoria High Court challenge to its controversial asylum policy, handing a victory to Lawyers for Human Rights (LHR). The LHR took Masetlha, Home Affairs Minister Mangosuthu Buthelezi and the department's standing committee for refugees to court over a circular issued by Masetlha, which ordered border authorities to turn back or detain asylum seekers who travel to SA via safe neighbouring countries. In the settlement agreement, which has been made an order of the court, the department undertook to inform border authorities within 24 hours that the circular had been "withdrawn". The LHR claimed the circular contravened the Refugee Act, which compels border authorities to allow people into SA to make a formal asylum application. (Business Day (South Africa), May 10, 2001)

The federal government will re-think immigration laws on the grounds that the courts are too generous in dealing

with refugees. Immigration Minister Philip Ruddock today confirmed he was looking at a package of possible changes to the law relating to the definition of refugees, to bring it back into line with the Refugees Convention. Ruddock has ordered his department to draw up new laws, restricting the power of judges to rule in favour of refugee applicants seeking to stay in Australia. Earlier this week the opposition warned that the government plan to rein in favourable court decisions on immigration appeals could be unconstitutional. At the same time the Law Council of Australia said its members must be able to operate without political interference. (The Australian Associated Press, May 10, 2001)

Elinor Caplan, the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, has agreed to demands from an all-party Commons committee to water down proposed legislation that would have given sweeping powers to immigration officers to deport permanent residents without appeal. (National Post (Canada), May 9, 2001)

A security loophole has been closed by France to prevent 'illegal' immigrants using the Eurostar Channel trains. The law will allow British immigration officers to check the passports of passengers boarding the trains in Paris, and for French counterparts to do the same in London. At present, passengers who board the train at Paris Gare du Nord with a ticket to an intermediate stop near the

French port of Calais do not undergo passport checks. The law, due to take effect this summer, aims to close a loophole that has allowed up to 400 'illegal' immigrants a month to enter Britain at London's Waterloo station and claim political asylum. French approval for the tightened checks follows agreement at a summit in February between President Jacques Chirac and British Prime Minister Tony Blair. (CNN, May 3, 2001)

A U.S. Senate subcommittee is reviewing the US' asylum policies. The subcommittee's interest immigrant advocates say is the latest sign that Congress and the courts are having second thoughts about sweeping changes made five years ago to the nation's immigration system. The U.S. Supreme Court is considering two challenges to the legality of those changes, which have sent thousands of non-citizens to jail. On Capitol Hill, meanwhile, lawmakers are pushing changes to protect families from being broken up by deportation. Another bill in the House would reduce the number of crimes requiring deportation, reinstate judicial review for immigration cases and end mandatory detention for people convicted of serious crimes. The sponsor is Rep. Bob Filner, D-Calif. (The Dallas Morning News, May 3, 2001)

#### **\* Myths**

Immigrant investors have put \$2.5 billion into the Canadian economy in the past five

years, according to a study by the federal immigration department. "They have contributed to the economic development of every Canadian province and territory," says the November 2000 study by research manager Martha Justus. "They have been responsible for the maintenance and creation of thousands of jobs." The study says immigrant entrepreneurs created more than 30,000 jobs in Canada between 1995 and 1998. (The Toronto Sun, May 9, 2001)

A major study of 'illegal' immigrants has found that almost all of them come to Britain with the intention of finding work, contrary to the popular image of new arrivals in search of generous benefits. Asylum seekers, who are registered on arrival, are largely prevented from working. (The Observer (U.K.), April 29, 2001)

#### **\* Numbers**

The numbers of Afghan asylum-seekers spreading out beyond the neighbouring countries, Pakistan and Iran, has climbed dramatically, especially over the past four years as conditions inside Afghanistan have continued to deteriorate. In all, during 2000, Afghans applied for asylum in, at least, 68 countries across the world. Europe, in particular, has seen a very steep increase in numbers with the arrival rate almost doubling in the past two years. (Pakistan Press International, May 9, 2001)

#### **\* Racism**

Forty per cent of people would be reluctant to welcome travelers, asylum seekers or members of ethnic minorities as neighbours, according to a survey published by Amnesty International to coincide with a new campaign against racism. Almost half of those questioned said that people should be prosecuted for racial abuse, and three-quarters agreed the Government had a responsibility to educate the public about racism. (The Irish Times, May 11, 2001)

Laurence Robertson, the British MP for Tewkesbury who had promised that he would not repeat his controversial views on race, reiterated his warning that Britain is a "crowded island" which is "struggling to come to terms with mass immigration." His remarks, less than 24 hours after he signed an anti-racism pledge drawn up by the Tory whips, came in an article for the Gloucestershire Echo. (The Guardian (U.K.), May 4, 2001)

Immigration officers have been given permission by the UK Home Office to "discriminate" against a named list of ethnic groups, namely Tamils, Kurds, Pontic Greeks, Roma, Somalis, Albanians, Afghans and ethnic Chinese. Home Office officials were at pains to say the move was not a matter of "race" but of "nationality" and "ethnic origin". The decision was taken as a result of last month's extension of

race relations laws to cover immigration officials. A Home Office spokeswoman said: "It was recognised that it was necessary to discriminate on the grounds of nationality or ethnic origin. The alternative is to subject all passengers of every nationality to the same degree of examination at immigration control, which would lead to significant delays and inconvenience." The list of targeted groups will be reviewed every month and based on "specific intelligence" or "statistical evidence". (The Independent (U.K.), May 4, 2001)

Scotland's largest council is to launch a propaganda drive on behalf of asylum seekers after an incident left two Palestinian refugees hospitalised. Glasgow City Council plans to distribute several thousand newsletters to residents in the Sighthill area to "sell" them the idea of asylum seekers and improve their public image. (The Scotsman, May 2, 2001)

### **\* Protests**

The Seoul Kyonggi Incheon Region Equality Trade Union (SKIRETU), a local trade union in Korea is pushing to form a union for migrant workers to pave the way for undocumented laborers to stand up for their rights in the workplace even though the current law bans foreigners from forming a union. So far, more than 100 foreigners, mainly undocumented workers and industrial trainees, have joined the union. (The Korea Times, May 11, 2001)

### **\* Repressive / Restrictive Measures**

Seven people have been convicted in The Netherlands for trafficking "illegal" Chinese immigrants. Two other defendants were found not guilty. They were all arrested after 58 immigrants were found dead in a truck at Dover, England. Two defendants received nine -year sentences and were fined 97,000 guilders (\$38,000). The others received sentences ranging from 30 months to seven years. (CNN, May 11, 2001)

Future immigrants hoping to remain in Germany would be obliged to take compulsory language and culture lessons, and even pass tests, if the opposition Christian Democrats CDU and their Bavarian sister party, Christian Socialist Union, come to power after elections next year. (The Financial Times (U.K.), May 11, 2001)

Indonesia and Australia have agreed to increase cooperation in the battle against groups that organise the traffic of "illegal" immigrants to the country. The Indonesian police had already helped to curb the flow of to Australia. (Asia Pulse, May 11, 2001)

A boat carrying 136 suspected "illegal" immigrants has been intercepted off Christmas Island, bringing the number of 'boat people' to arrive in Australian waters this year to more than 1800.

The 131 passengers - all male and of Middle Eastern origin - and five crew were detected off Australia's north-west coast. An Immigration Department spokeswoman said they would be taken to the mainland for questioning and customs and quarantine checks. Last year there were 1128 arrivals between January and the end of May. Immigration Minister Philip Ruddock said that cooperation from Middle East countries and Indonesia had reduced the flow of 'boat people.' (The Age (Australia), May 11, 2001)

The Garda National Immigration Bureau is to be expanded significantly in an attempt to combat trafficking in Ireland. The bureau has direct responsibility for immigration duties at Dublin Airport and indirect responsibility for more than 200 gardaí with immigration duties at other points of entry to the State. It also carries out deportations and provides a registration service for non-nationals. It has liaison officers in London and Paris. (The Irish Times, Thursday, May 10, 2001)

Pakistan is not going to grant refugee status to some 150,000 Afghans who illegally crossed into Pakistan from last autumn, fleeing from drought and a civil war. The Pakistani federal authorities refused to make concessions to the United Nations in matters of opening the border to all refugees, their registration and temporary accommodation in special

camps in Pakistan's territory. Islamabad believes that most Afghans who have no required documents on them are migrants for economic reasons. (Itar-Tass, May 10, 2001)

Airline passengers will be met by immigration hit squads the moment the plane doors open and asked for their papers as part of an "in your face" asylum strategy to be implemented by a new Conservative government. Ann Widdecombe, the Shadow Home Secretary, is determined to make an issue of her plans to strengthen Tory asylum policy and has made clear that she will not be knocked off course by the race row, which has damaged others in the party. (The London Times (U.K.), May 7, 2001)

A Welsh Assembly member has called for an inquiry following claims that a group of asylum seekers were handcuffed after being taken to a Welsh hospital for TB tests. (British Broadcasting Corporation, May 4, 2001)

Immigration Minister Elinor Caplan argued that Canada would be flooded with fraudulent passports and false identity documents if customs officials were stripped of their power to open mail from abroad. Vigorously defending a practice that has been denounced as an invasion of privacy, Caplan said the law empowering customs agents to open mail and pass any suspect documents to the Immigration Department has

resulted in the seizure of 4,000 pieces of fraudulent documents since 1995. (The Calgary Herald, May 1, 2001)

In "Ireland: An Audit of Human Rights Compliance 2000", compiled by the Amnesty International Irish section, the state was found to have fallen short on meeting a number of international treaties covering freedom from ill-treatment and the right to a fair trial. Its legal provisions for asylum seekers also fall seriously short of international law. (Press Association (U.K.), April 30, 2001)

### Stop Deportation from India

Abbas Rezai (25 years old) and Ghafor Zarin (28 years old), two Iranian asylum seekers born in Iranian Kurdistan were arrested and imprisoned by the Indian authorities in Mumbai, India in February 2001. Both are former political prisoners who will face torture and cruel and inhuman treatment and punishment should they be deported to Iran. The two are at serious risk of deportation to Iran. IFIR calls on progressive groups and individuals to write to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees demanding that they be granted refugee recognition and resettlement to a safe third country and to the Indian embassies in various countries demanding that they be released and their deportation stopped. Office of the UNHCR Chargé de Mission in India P.O. Box 3135, New Delhi 110003, India  
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## BUILDING A UNITED FUTURE

On May 26, 2001, Namazie will be speaking at the National Civil Rights Movement's Spring Conference entitled 'Building a United Future' at 9.30am at Highfields Youth and Community Centre, 96 Melbourne Road, Leicester LE2 ODS, UK.

The conference includes panels and sessions on: an appraisal of family campaigns, post-Macpherson racism and resistance, setting out our priorities, Britain's colour bars, building an anti-racist trade union network, fighting racism against asylum seekers; post-Macpherson: paradise or nightmare, racism in schools and education, and a public rally. Other speakers at the conference include: Suresh Grover, Imran Khan, Maxie Hayles, Jon McKenzie, Gareth Pierce, Mike Mansfield, Tony Benn MP, Arun Kundnani, Jabez Lam and union representatives. For more information and to book places, visit the website at: <http://www.ncrm.org.uk/conference> or contact: Halima Mohamed, National Civil Rights Movement, Tel: 020 8574 0818 / 020 8843 2333, Fax: 020 8813 9734, E-mail: [info@ncrm.org.uk](mailto:info@ncrm.org.uk).

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