

HAMBASTEGI

PAPER OF THE INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF IRANIAN REFUGEES



November 5, 2001

Campaign to Defend Afghan Refugee Rights

For the past two decades, the people of Afghanistan have been fleeing wars, oppression, violence, drought and hunger. Refugee camps along Afghanistan's borders have become a permanent feature of the area. With 3.5 million refugees, Afghanistan already tops the list of asylum producing countries in the world. The recent US-led bombings and the declaration of jihad by the Taliban have exacerbated this ongoing exodus.

Since the September 11 trag-

edy and the start of the US-led offensive against Afghanistan the number of people attempting to flee Afghanistan has escalated. . It is estimated that on a daily basis around two thousand Afghans head towards the borders in an attempt to escape. The Taliban rulers are blocking escape routes and are forcing people to join their 'holy war.' The neighbouring states have closed their borders and have mobilised their armed forces to make sure no refugees cross their borders.

Within a few days, from 13th to 16th of October, the Islamic Republic of Iran deported over 2300 Afghan refugees back to Afghanistan. The Pakistani government too ordered its border guards to open fire on refugees attempting to enter the country and killed a 23-year old man and injured a 13-year old child.

Escaping from the US led bombing and the reactionary Taliban is an undeniable right of the people of Afghanistan. The closing of borders under

such circumstances is a crime and those implicated in such acts are direct accomplices of the killings of defenceless people.

The International Federation of Iranian Refugees (IFIR) calls on all groups and individuals to join us and build a mass campaign in defence of Afghan refugees. We can and must stop this human catastrophe.

IFIR calls on groups and indi-

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IFIR 9th International Conference Asylum After September 11

November 16-18, 2001; 9:30 on
Stockholm, Sweden

With a Special Guest Speaker from RAWA, Pakistan and Mahin Alipur, Campaign in Defense of Women's Rights in Iran, Stockholm; Maria Bexelius, Amnesty International, Sweden; Karl Goran Bjorsmark, Parliamentary Committee on Iran, Sweden; Sten de Geer, Member of Parliamentary Committee on Refugee Issues, Sweden; Anita Dorazio, Asyl Committee, Sweden; Lars Fransen, Swedish Immigration Ministry; Suresh Grover, National Civil Rights Movement, UK; Farshad Husseini, IFIR, Holland; Keyvan Javid, Editor of Hambastegi Monthly, USA; Parvin Kaboli, Campaign in Defense of Women's Rights in Iran, Sweden; Asqar Karimi, Worker-communist Party of Iran; Ismail Moloodi, IFIR-Sweden Branch; Mehrnoush Moosavi, Hambastegi Weekly and Radio Producer, Germany; Maryam Namazie, International Federation of Iranian Refugees, UK; Okoth Osewe, Noone is Illegal, Sweden; Nasrin Ramzanali, IFIR Germany and others.

For further information: Telephone: +46 73 980 2311 or +44 7730107337; ifir9conference@yahoo.co.uk

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Send IFIR Conference Solidarity Messages

IFIR has spent 12 years unremittingly defending refugee rights, organising the protests of Iranian refugees and asylum seekers and placing them alongside progressive forces in their countries of residence, fighting racism and cultural relativism, the Islamic Republic of Iran and political Islam.

In support of IFIR and its work, send messages of solidarity and support to the IFIR 9th bi-annual conference at ifir9conference@yahoo.co.uk or ifir@ukonline.co.uk.

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Closing Borders is a Crime!

Interview with Maryam Namazie, Executive Director

On the IFIR's Campaign in Defence of Afghan Refugees



What is the situation of Afghan refugees today? What does IFIR's campaign aim to address?

The situation of Afghan refugees is truly an immense human tragedy. Of course this is not something new. In the past two decades, millions of Afghans have fled as a result of political Islam, criminal Taliban and reactionary Islamic gangs like the Northern Alliance, lack of rights, sexual apartheid, poverty, drought, and wars. Today, we are witnessing a new phase in the mass flight and deprivation of Afghans as a result of the US-led bombing of Afghanistan. In this catastrophic situation, while thousands are fleeing and attempting to reach safety, the borders of Iran, Pakistan and other Central Asian countries remain closed. The governments of Iran and Pakistan, for example, have amassed troops, dug trenches and used bullets to stop refugees from entering

safer areas. Recently, the Iranian government shot dead a refugee at the border; the Pakistani government killed a 23-year-old youth and injured a 13-year-old child. The criminal Taliban gang is also preventing people from fleeing. Tens of thousands have amassed at various borders pleading to get in. They are being put in camps in dangerous border areas within Afghanistan itself and given completely inadequate food, shelter, security, etc. In light of this situation, the IFIR is duty-bound to step up its defence of Afghan refugees and strive to prevent the further escalation of this human catastrophe and defend Afghan refugee rights.

What are the aims and demands of IFIR's campaign?

Our campaign is calling for an immediate end to the USA and NATO bombing of Afghanistan and the opening of borders to Afghan refugees,

both regionally and internationally. We have declared that closing borders on the Afghan people is a crime. Our campaign also calls on the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to immediately improve the living conditions and security of refugees and the refugee camps; the recognition of the right to asylum of Afghans both in the region and internationally and an immediate end to deportations. The civil rights of Afghans must be recognised. The UNHCR is obligated to intervene; governments must be compelled to open their borders.

The policy of deportation of Afghans has been a constant and ongoing policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Given that the regime has closed its borders in the current situation, do you really think that they will open the borders to Afghan refugees?

I believe it is possible to force the regime to open its borders. Even the most despicable and reactionary regimes in the world can be forced to back down as a result of public pressure and progressive social movements. Today in Iran, the people's movement has forced the regime to back down in many instances; internationally too, progressive movements have pushed back reactionary regimes and

policies. Today, we too can push back the Islamic regime's reactionary and inhuman policy against Afghan refugees. The people of Iran must and will push back the regime's assault on Afghan refugees. People around the world must and will do so. World public opinion must strongly proclaim that closing borders is a crime and will not be tolerated. Refugees must be allowed to leave border camps in Afghanistan, where they face security risks and are within the reach of the reactionary Taliban and other Islamic groups. This is possible. This is a struggle that we must win, especially since the lives of innumerable human beings are at risk if we do not succeed. Of course the people of Iran and Pakistan play a critical role in this struggle. For example, 80,000 Afghans have entered Pakistan 'unofficially,' most are being housed with Pakistanis or other Afghan refugees. We must do this on a larger scale in Iran and Pakistan and other countries.

Is the IFIR campaign focusing on neighbouring countries alone or on Western governments as well?

Our priority is of course the opening of borders of neighbouring countries, particularly Iran and Pakistan since these governments are obstructing all possibilities of flight for the people from Afghanistan. The borders of particularly Iran and Pakistan must open immediately. But Western governments must also sense our strongest

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viduals to demand the following:

- 1- An immediate end to the USA and NATO bombing of Afghanistan
- 2- Neighbouring countries, especially Iran and Pakistan, and others must open their borders. The closing of borders is a crime and those governments enforcing it are accomplices in the killings of the Afghan people.
- 3- The United Nations High

Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) must immediately improve the living conditions and security of refugees and the refugee camps, and prevent this human catastrophe.

- 4- The right to asylum of Afghans must be unconditionally recognised both in the region and internationally.
- 5- The deportation of Afghan refugees must end immediately.

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wrath and pressure. We have done this in the past and must escalate our protests. As I said before, there are millions of Afghan refugees in the world. After the end of the Cold War and the diminishing right to asylum, these are the very same people, who alongside Iranians, Iraqi Kurds, and others have drowned, suffocated and been killed as a result of closed borders and repressive measures. Just recently over 350 Afghan, Iraqi Kurd and other refugees drowned in the waters between Indo-

nesia and Australia. Men, women and children attempting to seek refuge died trying to reach a safer place. Ruddock, the fascist Australian Minister of Immigration blamed the refugees for taking unsafe routes when it is the global policy of denying access to asylum seekers that is to blame. This is one example of the international dimensions of the same catastrophic and criminal closing of borders, whether in Iran or Pakistan or in Australia and the West.

Sample Protest Letter

Iran

Mohammad Khatami
 Fax: +98 216 464 443
 Email: khatami@president.ir

Pakistan

General Pervez Musharraf
 Fax: +92 51 9207217
 E-mail: CE@pak.gov.pk

Tajikistan

Miasmal Sharipovich Rakhmonov
 Fax: +992 372 21 25 20

Uzbekistan

Fax: +998 71 1395325
 E-mail: presidents_office@press-service.uz

UNHCR Geneva

Fax: +41-22-739-7353
 E-mail: hqpr00@unhcr.ch

I / My Organisation condemn(s) the US and NATO bombing of Afghanistan and the closing of borders to Afghans fleeing the bombing and Taliban repression. I / my organization demand(s):

- 1- An immediate end to the USA and NATO bombing of Afghanistan
- 2- Neighbouring countries, especially Iran and Pakistan, and others must open their borders. The closing of borders is a crime and those governments enforcing it are accomplices in the killings of the Afghan people.
- 3- The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) must immediately improve the living conditions and security of refugees and the refugee camps, and prevent this human catastrophe.
- 4- The right to asylum of Afghans must be unconditionally recognised both in the region and internationally.
- 5- The deportation of Afghan refugees must end immediately.

Signed

Name, Address, E-mail

cc: ifir@ukonline.co.uk

IFIR's campaign states that flight is a right of the people of Afghanistan and closing borders on those fleeing is a crime. Why is this a crime?

When people have no choice but to leave everything they have and flee because of repression, political Islam and Islamic groups and states, reaction, bombing, drought, etc. in order to save their lives and their children's and family's lives, but their flight is obstructed or prevented, it is a crime. When people are condemned to remain under bombing, reaction, repression, poverty and sexual apartheid, it is nothing less than a crime. When the Australian, Iranian or Pakistani governments close their borders, they are complicit in the crimes committed by the Taliban, Political Islam's reaction and the of borders to Afghans.

The above was an interview on Radio International broadcast in Iran, its bordering countries and Europe.

Some Solidarity Messages to IFIR Conference

I have been following your struggles against oppression, and your advocacy for justice, respect for refugees' rights, and human rights in general. I wish to express my solidarity with IFIR. I applaud your efforts and wish success.

Kabahenda Nyakabwa
Canada

IFIR has been at the forefront of the struggle for refugee rights in Europe and for human rights around the world. The Campaign Against Racism and Fascism wishes IFIR a successful conference and salutes your work in these difficult times.

Arun Kundnani
Campaign Against
Racism and Fascism
London

I would like to take this opportunity to send you warmest greetings and solidarity on the occasion of your very important conference. I wish you every possible success in your deliberations and in your ongoing work in defence of refugees.

Bruce Allen, Vice-President, Canadian Autoworkers
Local 199, Canada

I continue to take refuge in your messages and editorials during these morally/political/humanly difficult times. Good luck on your conference; may it raise global consciousness about the plight of refugees.

Mahnaz Yousefzadeh
New York

The International Federation of Iranian Refugees has been standing at the forefront of defending refugee rights and strengthening humanistic values regardless of race, religion, gender and nationality for twelve years. IFIR which I am proud of working and cooperating with, is a defender of refugee women fleeing the Islamic Republic of Iran and fighting the reactionary idea and practice of cultural relativism.

Azam Kamguian, Coordinator and spokesperson,
Committee to Defend Women's Rights in the
Middle East

IFIR Ninth International Conference

ASYLUM AFTER SEPTEMBER 11

Friday 16 November

In English / Swedish

- 9:00-9:30am Opening Session
- 9:30-10:00am Messages of Solidarity
- 10:00-1:00pm Panel Discussion: Asylum after September 11
- 2:30-5:30pm Panel Discussion: Political Islam, the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Refugee Phenomenon
- 6:00-9:00pm Meeting of IFIR Secretariat and Country and City Representatives

Saturday 17 November

In Persian

- 9:00-9:30am Opening Session
- 9:30-9:45am In Solidarity with Afghan Refugees
- 9:45-10:00am Messages of Solidarity
- 10:00-1:00pm Country and international Reports
- 2:30-5:30pm Speech and Discussion: Asylum after September 11
- 6:00-8:00pm Open Discussion between Refugees and Asylum Seekers and IFIR Directors
- 8:00-12:00am Fundraiser with Live Music

Sunday 18 November

In Persian

- 9:00-11:00am Speech and Discussion: Political Islam, the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Refugee Phenomenon
- 11:00-1:00pm The Federation: An Effective Force for Positive Change
- 2:30-5:30pm Our Priorities
- 5:30-6:00pm Election of International Executive Director
- 6:00-7:00pm Workshop 1: Women Fleeing Islamist Societies
- Workshop 2: Rising Racism and Methods of Resistance
- 7:00-7:30pm Closing Ceremony

Registration Form:

Name:

Address:

Telephone:

E-mail:

Needs: Lodging Vegetarian
 Child Care Stall