

HAMBASTEGI

PAPER OF THE INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF IRANIAN REFUGEES



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December 10, 2001

'A Nightmare of Human Misery'

Eight asylum seekers, including several children, were found dead inside a cargo container at the Irish port of Waterford on Saturday 8 December. It is believed that they were locked in the container for at least nine days. The lorry driver and his assistant who found the asylum seekers after hearing noises from the container were treated for shock after witnessing what has been called 'a nightmare of human misery'. Five survivors found unconscious, semi-comatose and dehydrated were taken to Wexford General Hospital.

The International Federation of Iranian Refugees (IFIR) expresses its deep sympathy for the victims and their families and its outrage over the death of yet another eight human beings. While Bertie Ahern, the Irish Prime Min-

ister, and European leaders blame the people-smuggling trade for such tragedies, IFIR holds Fortress Europe directly responsible for their deaths. Asylum seekers have been forced to take riskier and more dangerous routes with

smugglers because of the impossibility of gaining access to Europe legally and safely. It is the Irish government's anti-asylum measures carried out under the guise of battling people smuggling and now terrorism, which really killed the eight.

IFIR calls on progressive groups and individuals to condemn the Irish government's anti-asylum policies. December 10, International Human Rights Day, and every other day must be turned into international days of protest against Fortress Europe and its closed borders. Dismantling Fortress Europe is the only way to end further human tragedies.



International Human Rights Day: A Day of Protest

December 10 is International Human Rights Day, commemorating the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. While the 'human rights' recognized in the declaration is extremely limited, December 10 is nonetheless an opportune day to raise our own banner of comprehensive and maximum human and asylum rights.

Join the International Federa-

tion of Iranian Refugees (IFIR), the Europe Roma Federation, the National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns and others to demand the right to asylum, and an end to anti-asylum measures, including 'snatch squads', deportation and detention in London.

Pickets outside several embassies, which are the source of many thousands

of asylum seekers: Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 10.00am Bulgarian Embassy, 10.30am Czech Republic Embassy, 11.00am Slovakia Embassy, Romania Embassy, Ukraine Embassy, and Polish Embassy 10.30am.

Press conference: 12.00pm in Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, with Bob Russell Liberal Democrat MP, Maryam

Namazie, and others.

Picket of Home Office: 1.00pm to 3.00pm, Queen Annes Gate, London SW1H 9AT, (nearest tube St James)

Picket of Irish Embassy: 2.00pm - No more 'Coffin Ships'

Vigil: Stand Up For Human Rights at Parliament Square, 6.00pm to 8.00pm

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‘Obstacles’ to the ‘Return’ of Afghans

by Maryam Namazie



The ink hasn't dried from the agreement setting up an interim government in Afghanistan, and European and regional governments are already stepping up plans to 'return' Afghans back to Afghanistan. Pakistan has been sending refugees living in cities for years to refugee camps in order to facilitate their return. 24,000 have 'voluntarily repatriated' from Iran, though the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) admits that 'some Afghans may have been deported'. The UK government is also talking of setting up a program to facilitate such 'returns.' Moreover, the UNHCR has renewed its efforts to drum up support for Afghan 'repatriation'. High Commissioner Ruud Lubbers has noted that the return of the world's largest population of refugees and displaced people will have a

significant impact on the stabilization, rehabilitation and economic recovery of Afghanistan. He adds that even the hundreds of thousands of Afghans who have been born 'in exile' over the past two decades and have 'never seen their homeland' can now return. No matter their citizenship, where they were born, the length of their residency abroad, and their own wishes – they must all return!

In planning the 'repatriation' program, however, Mr. Lubbers does manage to mention some 'obstacles' to the return of Afghans, namely 'enormous destruction of homes and infrastructure throughout the country and the scourge of millions of landmines'. He forgets to add 'bombings, civil war, drought, famine, Islamic re-

action, continued sexual apartheid and rights violations. In Afghanistan, millions are at risk of starving to death this winter. Recent factional fighting prompted the United Nations to pull its international staff out of Mazar-i-Sharif though that agency continues to go ahead with preparations to send Afghans back. Last week, armed men stopped a bus outside Kabul and hacked off the ears and noses of six men on board as punishment for shaving off their beards. Women are still forcibly veiled and continue to be denied their rights, including the right to protest (the last time a women's rights demonstration was banned, the orders came from the Bonn Summit itself). Another 'obstacle' Mr. Lubbers fails to mention is the fact that the transitional government that is to take control in a few weeks is made up of mostly war criminals who should be tried for crimes against the Afghan people rather than run the country. And that is not all. From the standpoint of the UN and Western governments, Afghans are such sub-humans that they are not eligible to participate in free elections and live in a secular society. Power is divided among the most brutal, and

after a while, an ethnic council from pre-historic times called the Loya Jirga will run the country some more. Even the rights of Afghans are relative. The Bonn agreement 'acknowledges the right of the people of Afghanistan to freely determine their own political future in accordance with the [antithetical] principles of Islam, democracy, pluralism and social justice'. There will also be a Judicial Commission to 'rebuild the justice system in accordance with Islamic principles, international standards, the rule of law and Afghan legal traditions' – which means more stonings, floggings, compulsory veiling, child marriages... Once again religious and ethnic reaction has been imposed on the Afghan people. This must be resisted. The forcible return of Afghans who have fled two decades of this Islamic reaction must also be resisted. Afghans must be given protection and their right to asylum and their universal human rights must be recognised. Anything less is unacceptable.

Next Issue:

17 December
2001

Support Campaign to Defend Afghan Refugees

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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.

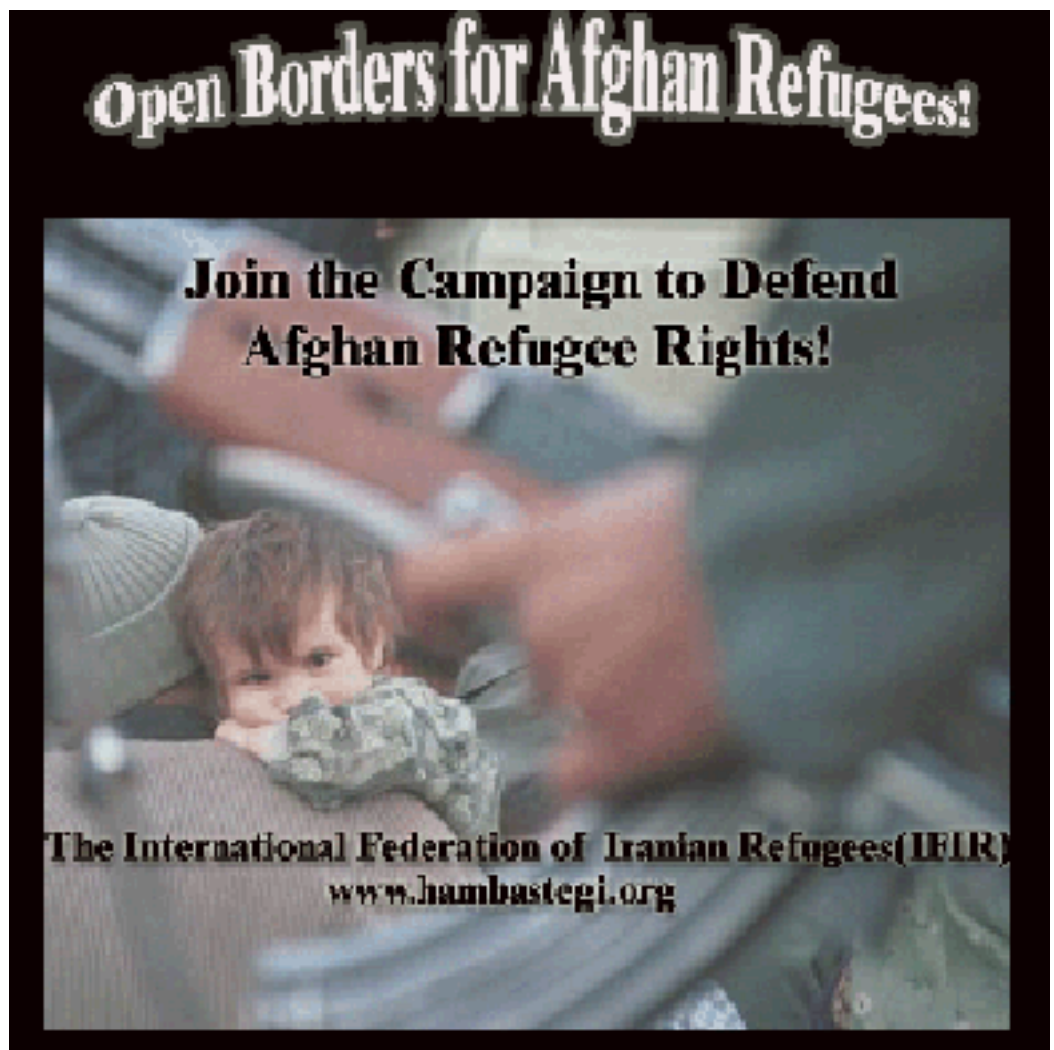
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