



On International Women's Day

Condemn Sexual Apartheid and Compulsory Veiling and Defend Women Refugees and Asylum Seekers

More than ever before, the events following September 11 have demonstrated the critical need for effective international efforts in defence of the rights of women and girls and secularism vis-à-vis the Islamic movement. Now, the world knows what Islamic governments and groups have unleashed upon the people and especially women and girls in the Middle East and North Africa over the past three decades.

In Iran, a pillar of political Islam and terrorism in the region, girls can be legally raped under the guise of marriage at the age of nine or younger if her male guardian permits; a husband can deny his spouse from working if he finds it incompatible with the family's 'interests and dignity'. Many fields of study and occupations are closed to women and women need the permission of their husbands or male guardians to travel. Their rights to divorce are extremely limited;

they have no long-term right to child custody. Furthermore, women can be executed for being a lesbian and stoned to death for voluntary sexual relationships outside of marriage; the law even specifies the size of the stone to be used. Sexual apartheid rules and women are segregated in schools, buses, public offices, even while swimming in the sea, and must compulsorily veil each time they venture outside. The government and its religious rule of law interfere in every aspect of

people's lives.

On International Women's Day, March 8, the International Federation of Iranian Refugees (IFIR) reiterates its condemnation of sexual apartheid and compulsory veiling, unequivocally defends the struggle of women and girls in Iran and the Middle East and North Africa for freedom and equality, and demands protection for all those fleeing sexual apartheid and sex-based persecution.

Campaign against UNHCR's Violations of Refugees Rights in Turkey

The International Federation of Iranian Refugees and the International Federation of Iraqi Refugees are beginning a joint international campaign against the inhuman situation and rightlessness of refugees and refugee claimants in Turkey on February 28, 2002. This protest campaign is primarily against the UN High Commissioner for Refugees' (UNHCR) treatment and performance vis-à-vis thousands of refugees and claimants in Turkey.

Currently, thousands of

refugees and refugee claimants primarily from Iran and Iraq are living in intolerable circumstances. The process of determining refugee status takes months and sometimes years. Those refused by the UNHCR are not even given reasons for their rejection and are thus deprived of the right to properly defend themselves. In all internationally recognised procedures, refugee and asylum claimants have the right to information on the reasons of rejection as a basic civil right. In the

UNHCR procedure, refugee claimants have only one right to appeal, and are often not even interviewed a second instance before their case files are closed, leaving them at imminent risk of deportation back to persecution. Refugees are often humiliated by UNHCR legal officers, translators and guards. There have been reports of several instances where guards have beaten women and men attempting to gain assistance from that agency. Women refugee claimants are often not

interviewed separately from their spouses and sex-based persecution cases are not addressed in a serious and comprehensive manner.

Iranian refugee claimants arriving from Iraqi Kurdistan (due to the insecurity, surveillance machinery of the Islamic regime, and the inactivity of the UNHCR there) are treated inhumanely and denied resettlement to a safe third country. Refugee claimants do not have access to any medical or financial assistance while their claims are being determined. In

Campaign against UNHCR's Violations of Refugees Rights in Turkey, from P. 1

many instances, those recognised by the UNHCR are also denied any financial assistance. This is under conditions where refugee claimants are denied the right to work in Turkey, thereby imposing hunger, abject poverty, deprivation, homelessness and serious health problems for women, men and children. Those who enter without documents (as many asylum seekers and refugees do) are sent to languish in cities bordering the countries they have fled, leaving them in a state of insecurity, open to attacks by Islamic terrorist groups and states and the constant fear of deportation. The UNHCR not only imposes rightlessness but also strives to prevent the legitimate protests of refugees and asylum seekers by collaborating with the Turkish police. These policies are against international and civil rights norms.

Hundreds of claimants are currently on the verge of deportation. The Islamic

Republic of Iran's execution of a deported Iranian asylum seeker, Karim Tujali, a few weeks ago has renewed the real fear of execution and persecution in all refugees and refugee claimants residing in Turkey.

This abysmal situation cannot continue. We are therefore launching an international campaign against these conditions and the violation of basic refugee rights.

We call on all asylum seekers and refugee claimants in Turkey and elsewhere to join our campaign, close ranks and protest against the UNHCR. We are launching a positive campaign based on unity and will be relying on our collective action and the support of progressive people and organisations including trade unions and rights organisations. We wish to point out that our tradition of fighting for our rights runs against any self-inflicting mental and physical

injuries. There will be several demonstrations at UNHCR offices in various countries worldwide on 28 February to launch our campaign.

The demands of this campaign are:

1. Recognition of the right to asylum for all those fleeing Iran, Iraq and Afghanistan, especially women and children;
2. Recognition of Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan as unsafe countries;
3. The immediate re-opening and review of all closed case files;
4. Improvements in the determination procedures, including the disclosure of the reasons for rejection, increasing the number of appeals and interviews and expediting reviews;
5. The provision of basic living and health needs for refugees and refugee claimants and their residence in cities away from the border areas and outside the reach of terrorist agents;

6. The UNHCR's resolute intervention against deportations. The UNHCR is responsible for the threats to the lives and safety of deportees;

7. The immediate resettlement of those recognised as refugees to a safe third country, including those Iranians who have fled Iraqi Kurdistan for fear of their lives and the inactivity of the UNHCR offices in Northern Iraq;

8. Recognition of the rights of refugees and claimants to protest.

The International Federation of Iranian and Iraqi Refugees call upon all refugees and asylum seekers, progressive political parties, trades unions and civil rights organisations to lend their support to this campaign.

*Central Secretariat –
International Federation
of Iranian Refugees
Central Secretariat –
International Federation
of Iraqi Refugees*

Voucher Scheme Scrapped in UK

On Monday 25 February, David Blunkett, the UK Home Secretary announced that the discredited voucher scheme would be scrapped and replaced by cash payments on 8 April 2002. This is a significant victory for the asylum and anti-racist movement. The International Federation of Iranian Refugees - UK is proud to have contributed to this victory.

The UK government's retreat has been made possible only after a massive and collective struggle on the part of progressive and freedom loving people and groups in this country. This victory has proven that changes and improvements in the conditions of refugees and asylum seekers can be attained if we stick to our just demands and steadfastly pursue them. We need to

build on this victory. There are many more battles that we need to win. We must close down the detention centres. Far too many asylum applications are rejected. We must stop deportations to the Iran, Afghanistan, Iraq and other countries. Many more pressing issues are remaining and they require our unity and active presence in the struggle against anti-asylum policies.

Next Issue:
Monday
11 March

www.hambastegi.org

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Sign Petition against UNHCR's Violations of Refugees Rights in Turkey

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We, the undersigned, condemn the inhuman situation and rightlessness of Iranian, Iraqi and Afghan refugees and refugee claimants in Turkey and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees' (UNHCR) treatment and performance vis-à-vis thousands of refugees and claimants in Turkey. We demand that the UNHCR 1. Recognise the right to asylum for all those fleeing Iran, Iraq and Afghanistan, especially women and children; 2. Recognise Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan as unsafe countries; 3. Immediately re-open and review all closed case files; 4. Improve the determination procedures, including the disclosure of the reasons for rejection, increasing the number of appeals and interviews and expediting reviews; 5. Provide basic living and health needs for refugees and refugee claimants and their residence in cities away from the border areas and outside the reach of terrorist agents; 6. Intervene resolutely against deportations. The UNHCR is responsible for the threats to the lives and safety of deportees; 7. Immediately resettle those recognised as refugees to a safe third country, including those Iranians who have fled Iraqi Kurdistan for fear of their lives and the inactivity of the UNHCR offices in Northern Iraq; and 8. Recognise the rights of refugees and claimants to protest.

Name
Organisation
Country

Copies of letters can be sent to:

UNHCR Geneva, UNHCR, HQPRO 2, Case Postale 2500, CH-1211 Geneva 2 Depot, Switzerland, Fax: 011-41-22-739-7353, Tel: 011-41-22-739-8643, E-mail: Hqpr00@Unhcr.Ch

International Federation of Iranian Refugees (IFIR), P. O. Box 27236, London N11 27F, Tel: +44 (0) 7730 107 337, ifir@ukonline.co.uk, <http://www.hambastegi.org>

Another Victory for Asylum Seekers in Australia

According to a report compiled by asylum seekers in prison in Australia, the persistent struggle of those imprisoned in Woomera and the support of progressive organisations, finally paid off. On 22 February, the Australian immigration authorities agreed to cancel a visit to the prison by an

Afghan government delegation. The refugees' spokesperson from the detention centre also reported that 10 Afghan asylum seekers were granted leave to remain and consequently released from Woomera.

The IFIR - Australia welcomes this victory and

congratulates all those involved in this campaign. As always, this victory was secured through the collective actions and the unity of refugees and extensive support by progressive individuals and organisations.

We are determined to

resolutely continue our campaign both inside and outside immigration prisons and mobilise a wider section of Australian public opinion. We are also determined to seek wider support from the working class in Australia. Such support is vital to combat the Australian government's racist policies.

Islam, Secularism and Women in the Middle East Conference

Saturday 9 March 2002

10am-5pm

University of London Union, Mallet Street, London WC1E 7HY

Hosted by The Middle East Centre for Women's Studies and Medusa magazine

10.00am - 1.00pm

Asma Khuder, "Law and women's rights in Jordan" (Sisterhood is Global Institute /Jordan, Amman)

Nadia Mahmood, "Women and Sharia (Islamic) law" (Middle East Centre for Women Studies); Abd Al-Salam Nour Al-ddin, "Women, marriage and rape in Islam" (The Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies- University of Exeter); Azar Majedi (Medusa Magazine)

2.00 – 2.30pm

Announcements & messages from women's organisations: Shiva Mahbobi (International Tribunal against the Rightlessness of Women Living Under Islamic Law); Sawsan Salim (Kurdistan Iraq: Violence against Women – Women against violence project); Shirley Dent "Women in the media in the UK" (Editor of New Humanist Magazine)

2.30 - 4.30pm

Ayda Touma Sulaiman "The personal state issue between State patriarchy and religious laws: the case of Palestinian women in Israel" (Women against violence); Nadjie Al-Ali "Secularism, gender and the State in Middle East: The Egyptian women's movement" (The Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies- University of Exeter); Maryam Namazie "Political Islam is antithetical to women's rights" (International Federation of Iranian Refugees)

Plenary

4.30 - 5.00pm Proposals & closing speech

Ali Amiri Freed in Switzerland

After spending four months in an immigration prison in Zurich, Switzerland and facing imminent deportation to Iran, Ali Amiri was finally released on 27 February 2002. His release was secured as a result of a long and tireless campaign by the International Federation of Iranian Refugees - Switzerland. IFIR congratulates all Amiri and all those who campaigned on his behalf.

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