



Defend Asylum Seekers and Refugees in Turkey

Keyvan Javid



On February 28, the International Federations of Iranian and Iraqi Refugees have initiated a campaign against the United Nations High Commissioner for

Refugees' (UNHCR) anti-refugee policies and in defence of thousands of Iraqi, Iranian and Afghan refugees and asylum seekers in Turkey.

Living Conditions

Thousands of refugees and asylum seekers are living in inhuman conditions in Turkey. They do not receive any financial support from

the UNHCR and are denied access to free health care while their claims are being determined, a process that could take several years. Even those eventually

recognised by the UNHCR do not automatically get financial assistance. Add to this the fact that asylum seekers and refugees are denied the right to work in Turkey and the tragedy becomes all the more clear. As a result of these policies, asylum seekers and refugees are faced with dire poverty, serious health risks, hunger and homelessness.

Legal Status

Upon entry to Turkey, asylum seekers are divided into two groups. Those without documents are forced to register themselves and live

in towns bordering countries from which they have fled. Fear of being kidnapped by Islamic states and groups, deported back to persecution, and brutalised by the Turkish police are main concerns of refugees and asylum seekers. Those arriving with documentation are transferred to central towns surrounding Ankara. All refugees and asylum seekers are denied freedom of movement or the right to choose city of residence. They are denied the right to organise and protest; activists, especially those

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Another Eleven Sentenced to Death and Four Women Flogged in Iran

Eleven political prisoners accused of associating with the Kurdistan Democratic Party in Iran or Komala have been sentenced to death. According to Amnesty International, three of them - Muhammad Sharverani, Khaled Faraidouni and Nader Afani - are believed to be detained in Mahabad prison. Three others are believed to be held in Orumieh. They are 27-year-old Hasan Mahmoudi; 50-year-old Khaled Shoghi, who was reportedly forcibly returned from Turkey and

arrested in 1997, and has reportedly been tortured; and Kheder Viesi. Saleh Goudarzi is reportedly detained in Sanandaj prison. Jalil Zeva'i was 18 when he was arrested in 1993; he has been in prison ever since, and has reportedly been tortured. Rasul Abdollahpour was reportedly arrested in 1994, and Anvar Alizadeh in 1997. Mohammad Esmailzadeh or Esmaili, aged 35, was reportedly arrested in 1996 or 1997; there is an unconfirmed report that he suffered a leg

injury some time after he was imprisoned, which still causes him pain, and for which he has been denied any medical treatment. Also at risk is Mohammad Mehdi Zaliye, aged 32; he was reportedly arrested in 1992, and is alleged to be suffering from 'neurological problems caused by brutal mental and physical torture'. Another five men have recently been condemned to death in Ahvaz, apparently for opposing the government's policy of land seizures in the region. They are named as Fadhil Muqaddam, Rahim Sawari, Amir Sa'idi, Hashem Bawi

and 'Abbas Sherhani. Previously, on 27 January, five Arab men were hanged in Ahvaz, southwestern Iran and on 24 January Karim Tuzhali, a refugee deported from Turkey was executed in Iran after three years in prison.

Moreover, on March 9, one day after International Women's Day, officials of the Islamic regime flogged 4 women in the city centre of Kermanshah for transgressing Islamic rules. The people in the centre booed officials and forced them to re-

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We will not Budge!

About Mona Sahlin and Margareta Winberg's proposed plan to the Swedish Government

By Mahin Alipour, Parvin Kaboli, Sara Mohammad, Halaleh Rafeh and Khalil Keyvan

Mona Sahlin, the Swedish Minister for Integration, and Margareta Winberg, Minister of Gender Equality, have eventually announced their proposal for the Swedish government's action plan in defence of vulnerable girls in patriarchal and traditional families. The main themes of this proposal are increasing the minimum age of marriage from 15 to 18, declaring that the state will side with girls and young women, that no culture, tradition and religion will have supremacy over the individual rights of women, increased victim support, improvements in determining women's asylum claims, and evaluating further options for integration.

Though the proposed plan ignores many important issues, from our point of view, the recognition of this extent of demands by the said Ministers and their acknowledgement of the destructive nature of culture, religion and tradition (which Swedish politicians have defended under the pretext of respect for cultures and racist cultural relativism) is a great victory for those of us who have fought for these demands for years. We see this as a victory for our campaign and will insist on the realisation of our other essential demands and intensify our efforts to this end. For many years, we have declared our clear, specific and extremely

human demands in defence of women, girls, and children of Islamic, patriarchal, and traditional immigrant families, have fought for them, and have warned the government and ruling parties about the abuse of women and children in these families. It is regrettable that extremely important and clear demands such as the prohibition of religious education and schools for children and compulsory veiling for young girls have been ignored in the proposed plan, thereby overtly overlooking the fundamental rights of girls and children in these families.

Ms. Mona Sahlin and Ms. Margareta Winberg only see the tip of the iceberg - that is they only see honour killings. They turn a blind eye to a world of physical and psychological abuses, the daily destruction of the beautiful and natural desires of thousands of children, the brainwashing of children with religious superstitions and backward, misogynous ideas, the veiling of children - a symbol of women's slavery, the denial and discrimination of girls' access to music, dance and many other games and recreations and innumerable other forms of daily harassment and abuse of girls and children in Islamic and patriarchal families. They do not want to accept that these killings are the outcome and result of the very culture and

religion which a handful of reactionary mullahs are currently hammering into the heads of innocent children to kill the human spirit in them and turn them into honour worshippers;. They do not want to accept that children have no religion, intolerance or prejudice, and have not registered in any religious sect, are not the property of their parents and that it is the responsibility of law and society to protect them from the harm of religion and religious sects. They do not want to accept that in the heart of Europe they have succumbed to a religion and a culture that tens of millions of men and women in Iran, Iraq, Algeria and Turkey despise and are trying to get rid of from their lives. The politicians and the ruling parties in Sweden have chosen Mullahs over children.

It would have been better if Ms. Mona Sahlin and Ms. Margareta Winberg had not capitulated to Islam and the Islamists. Society requires a fundamental solution and the Ministers do not doubt that if they chose a principled and radical policy, they would be supported by the majority of society and immigrants in Sweden. They did not want to do so. The Swedish government and politicians are an impediment in the realisation of people's fundamental rights. We, however, are obliged to defend the civil

rights of women, children and people and will not budge. As the representatives of society's and immigrants' secular, progressive, modern and pro-equality elements, and given the extensive support our demands have received, we will intensify the struggle for the realisation of these demands. Our demands are so human and clear that is not possible to resist them for long. We are determined to recapture, step by step, all the trenches that the Islamists have imposed in European countries in the context of European states' right wing policies during the Cold War. In the same way that in countries like Iran we are recapturing much larger trenches, our movement is more than ever before progressing; this is clear for all to see.

Once again, we declare our demands and call on all pro-equality, progressive and children's rights organisations to support our demands and impel the Swedish government to respect people's fundamental rights. The time to put an end to medieval laws has arrived.

1. Immediate prohibition of religious schools and education and in the meanwhile the inspection of all religious schools, particularly Islamic schools.
2. Immediate prohibition of veiling of children.

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linked with the International Federations who become known to the authorities are often harassed and threatened. The UNHCR benefits from the dispersal policy of refugees which impedes the right to expression and association. Often times, it is the UNHCR that informs the authorities of refugee protests which are then met with violence, arrests, and even deportations.

Determination Procedures

Asylum seekers must register with the Turkish authorities within ten days of arrival otherwise they will be

deemed 'illegal' by the government. They must also register with the UNHCR; the UNHCR and government determine status separately. Since non-European asylum seekers and refugees cannot reside permanently in Turkey, they are only issued temporary stay permits. Those recognised are resettled to safer third countries.

Determination procedures are extremely long. Those who register with the UNHCR wait for approximately 4-6 months to be interviewed in the first instance. At best, a decision is reached on their claim in another 6 months. Most first instance decisions

are rejections. The UNHCR does not provide reasons for rejection, making it impossible for asylum seekers to defend their claims. After appeal, asylum seekers have to wait another several months for a second interview. IFIR knows of a number of cases that are waiting from one to two years for a second interview. Often times, case files are closed without a second interview. During this time, the UNHCR does not respond to calls or letters of asylum seekers nor advises them on reasons for these delays. The UNHCR's legal officers, translators and staff generally treat asylum seekers with contempt.

Join our Campaign

There are innumerable other examples of rightlessness in Turkey. This intolerable situation must change. We have often witnessed governments and the UNHCR backing down under the face of international pressure. Once again, we must send the UNHCR a barrage of faxes and protest letters demanding that they respect refugee and asylum rights in Turkey. Undoubtedly, this support and solidarity of organisations, individuals, labour union and parties, will bring about critical changes.

Free Hadi and Sheikhi

Mohiaddin Hadi and Salam Sheikhi, two Iranian asylum seekers, have been detained and imprisoned under inhumane conditions by the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) in Erbil, Iraqi Kurdistan, for the past several months. Hadi and Sheikhi are amongst thousands of Iranians forced to flee the Islamic regime of Iran. Many

head towards the city of Soleimaniyeh to approach the UNHCR office in that city. This city has increasingly become unsafe for Iranians due to the collaboration between the ruling party in the region, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, and the Iranian regime. Fearing for their lives, Hadi and Sheikhi fled to Erbil, only to be arrested

by the ruling party in that city - the KDP.

The International Federation of Iranian Refugees condemns the arrests and demands that both be released immediately. IFIR holds the KDP and the UNHCR responsible for their safety and well-being. We call on groups and individuals to

send letters of protest to the KDP, Central Office: kdppress@aol.com, Fax: +87376160321; European Office: kdpeurope@t-online.de, Fax: +493079743746; UNHCR office in Iraqi Kurdistan: irqba@unhcr.ch; Geneva: hqpr00@unhcr.ch, Fax: +41227398643.

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treat.

The IFIR unequivocally opposes the death penalty and any form of cruel and inhuman treatment and punishment. The Islamic regime of Iran must be condemned for executing, imprisoning, flogging, and

torturing innumerable people in Iran.

IFIR calls on progressive organisations and individuals to protest these inhumane sentences and brutalities by the Islamic Republic of Iran and intervene to prevent further tragedies. Faced with

a wave of strikes and industrial unrests especially by teachers and nurses, the Islamic Republic of Iran has stepped up its repressive measures. We too must step up our pressure against the regime and in defence of those resisting it.

Next Issue:
Monday
18 March

Maryam Namazie,
Executive Director

Keyvan Javid, Deputy
Executive Director

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

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06550 Cankaya, Ankara, Turkey
Tel: +90312-4411696
Fax: +90312-4412173
E-mail: Turan@Unhcr.Ch

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>

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3. Immediate prohibition of children's circumcision and genital mutilation. grants. *Mahin Alipour, Spokeswoman for the Campaign in Defence of Women's Right in Iran, Stockholm*
4. An end to all subsidies and government grants and payments to religious organisations and institutions. *Parvin Kaboli, Spokeswoman for the Campaign in Defence of Women's Right in Iran, Sweden*
5. Equality before the law for all; the prohibition of reduced sentences for those who kill or abuse children and women, and the imposition of a maximum sentence for religious, ethnic and patriarchal crimes. *Sarah Mohammad, Director of 'Never forget Pela'*
6. An end to ghetto-isation and the adoption of an active and immediate policy for the integration of immigrants. *Halaleh Rafteh, Spokeswoman for the Campaign in Defence of Women's Right in Iraq, Sweden*
7. *Khalil Keyvan, Secretary of the Worker-communist Party of Iran, Organisation Abroad, Sweden*

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