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Safe according to whose interests?

Maryam Namazie



On 14-15 October the EU's Justice and Home Affairs Council in Luxembourg took measures to ensure that thousands of asylum seekers fleeing to EU countries from Central and Eastern Europe could be sent straight back without their claim for asylum

being considered. The ten countries due to join the EU in January 2004 will be considered 'safe' countries of origin and applications for asylum from nationals of those countries will be considered 'manifestly unfounded'. This intergovernmental declaration will become effective upon gaining the needed number of signatures irrespective of national laws.

Application of this concept to certain countries basically means that since the specific countries are deemed safe, people fleeing them are either automatically precluded from obtaining asylum/refugee status or, placed into an expedited procedure which

begins with the assumption that their claims are unfounded.

Whilst Western governments have for years worked towards establishing this concept as a basic international norm in the refugee regime, this EU declaration has brought us one step closer to seeing this concept become a dark reality for thousands fleeing persecution.

Let's be clear: this concept is different from many of the anti-refugee policies we have seen. It is different from previous challenges we have faced from states considering countries of origin effectively 'safe' to deport so-called

'failed' asylum seekers. We have stood up against deportations in all instances. For example, in Holland in 1997, the Dutch government wanted to deport over one thousand Iranian asylum seekers whose claims had been rejected by effectively deeming Iran safe for that group of asylum seekers. This policy was defeated by the International Federation of Iranian Refugees and others, especially when it came to light that even those rejected and deported were not in fact safe. But the safe country of origin concept goes far beyond what the Dutch government tried to do in 1997 and governments have been

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UK Committee on Human Rights expresses grave concerns

Saeed Arman

MPs on the Joint Committee on Human Rights have expressed grave concerns that the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Bill in its present form will lead to serious breaches of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), the International Covenant on

Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESC) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. This anti-asylum bill introduced by David Blunkett has faced serious opposition by various organisations and trade unions including the International Federations of Iranian and Iraqi Refugees.

The bill has many racist and inhuman proposals, including

the following:

- * It will prevent asylum seeking children from attending public schools, and segregate them to special schools in asylum seeking camps.

- * It will deem certain Central and Eastern European countries as 'safe', which includes Poland, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia.

- * It will force asylum seekers

to introduce themselves to immigration authorities at the airports and seaports, otherwise they will be deported.

- * It will keep refugees at assigned localities for further control and speed up their refugee claims; if denied, they will be deprived from remaining in the country.

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doing year in and year out. If we continue to use the Dutch example, this concept would mean that not only would so-called 'failed' asylum seekers to be sent back but claims by every Iranian asylum seeker would be deemed unfounded; they wouldn't even have the right to apply for asylum! This is what the EU declaration and this concept really means.

This concept is extremely dangerous because it completely changes the definition of refugee, which will no longer be based on people's fear of persecution but on where they fled from. It precludes *a priori* an entire group of asylum seekers from refugee status.

In establishing this concept, the EU states are targeting

those countries that will be joining the EU because it is their safest bet for now but what will happen to thousands who are fleeing from those specific countries already? What will happen to the Roma who have fled and are fleeing racism, discrimination, death and rights violations? This declaration denies their basic right to seek and enjoy asylum. It denies entire groups of people the right to safety. For this reason alone, this declaration must be unequivocally condemned. But you can be sure that there will be more to come. Its implementation via this declaration will mean that tomorrow Iran, Iraq, and Afghanistan will be deemed safe and people fleeing from these countries will not be able to even apply for

asylum!
One can confidently guarantee that this list will expand to include all those countries from which large numbers are fleeing (if it isn't contrary to the foreign policy of the time) especially since the aim of this concept is to stop the flow of asylum seekers from specific countries. Given that asylum seekers fleeing the Middle East and political Islam are one of the largest refugee flows, they will soon be next.

This declaration while geographically limited now will impact on all asylum seekers and has to be resisted. Undoubtedly, soon, by relying on the racist theory of cultural relativism, and for their own political and economic gains, these states will deem countries like Iran 'safe'. Aren't they already calling the vile Islamic Republic of Iran, which still

stones people to death and hangs them in public by cranes, an Islamic democracy?

The main question is this: safe from whose perspective and interests? Definitely not from the asylum seeker's perspective and interests, whether so-called failed or newly arriving! From their perspective, and from ours, things aren't safe otherwise they wouldn't literally be dying to get in. If it were safe, thousands upon thousands wouldn't flee from the very same countries they have been fleeing from for decades.

We must resist this safe country of origin concept and plan. The right to asylum is a right for everyone who is fleeing persecution, execution, torture and rights violations and discrimination. We must unequivocally defend this right.

Mansoor Hekmat (1951-2002)



With the bloody suppression of the revolution in Iran and the imposition of an ultra-reactionary life on the people, tens of thousands of human beings, alone and without organisation, fled the Islamic Republic of Iran in search of security and tranquillity. Organising this

vast human mass around the most modern and humane advances of humanity, unconditionally defending their right to asylum, and creating an international organisation without taking into consideration people's nationality, religion, sex and or political affiliation became an immediate necessity. Creating the International Federation of Iranian Refugees (IFIR) was Mansoor Hekmat's response to these conditions. As he said: 'Our entire life story is changing the lives of human beings.'

**STOP DEPORTATIONS
TO ISLAM-STRICKEN
SOCIETIES**

**IRAN IS
UNSAFE**

Stop Executions in Iran

In the past few weeks, tens of people have been publicly hanged or stoned to death by the Islamic regime in Iran; several of those executed were known political prisoners. Others are awaiting execution, including 19-year-old Salar Kerdari for activities against the regime, Ghader Makhmal for taking part in the recent prison protests in the city of Mahabad, and Saeed Maasoori for opposition to the regime.

The International Federation of Iranian Refugees (IFIR) unequivocally condemns the Islamic Republic of Iran and executions in all forms and calls on groups and individuals to exert pressure on the Islamic regime to stop the executions and stonings. We

must not allow this regime to kill anymore human beings. International pressure can be instrumental in saving lives.

Send your letters of protest to:

Mohammad Khatami, E-mail: khatami@president.ir. Address: The Presidency, Palestine Avenue, Azerbaijan Intersection, Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran.

Sample letter:

I/My organisation strongly condemn(s) the Islamic Republic of Iran for its recent executions and stonings and demand(s) an immediate end to all forms of execution. Please send copies to ifir@ukonline.co.uk.



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The IFIR calls on groups and individuals to keep up the pressure against this inhuman bill. For more information on actions against this bill, contact the IFIR UK Branch.

Stop Stoning Now!

According to the International Committee against Stoning, of which IFIR is a member, another woman has been stoned in the city of Yazd in Iran. She managed to free herself from the ditch in which she was buried in up to the chest to be stoned to death. According to Islamic law, if the person who is to be stoned is able to get out of the ditch, the stoning must not continue and s/he must be released. Nosrat Abouie, however, has been arrested and imprisoned by the Iranian regime. End stoning now. Join IFIR's campaign to stop executions.

STOP DEPORTATIONS TO ISLAM-STRICKEN SOCIETIES

JOIN IFIR

* I wish to join **the International Federation of Iranian Refugees (IFIR)** as:

__ Member (£25.00 p.a.)__ Affiliated Group (£100.00 p.a.)

* I wish to make a donation of: £__ I wish to subscribe to Hambastegi English or Iran Monitor: __ (£50.00 p.a.)

Name: _____ **E-mail:** _____

Address: _____

Please make cheques payable to the International Federation of Iranian Refugees and mail to P. O. Box 27236, London N11 2ZF.

* I wish to make a standing order:

To: The Manager of (your Bank) _____

(Address of your Bank) _____

Please pay **the International Federation of Iranian Refugees (IFIR)** the sum of £_____ each month / quarter / year (delete as appropriate) until further notice and debit my Account no: _____ Sort Code: _____

starting on (date): _____

Name: _____ Address: _____

Signature: _____

[FOR OFFICE USE ONLY] To: **International Federation of Iranian Refugees**, Lloyds TSB bank plc. Sort Code: 30-99-86, account no. 0057223.

IFIR Country Directors

Australia: Arsalan Nazeri, Tel: +61 401005422, ifir@iprimus.com.au; **Azerbaijan:** Hassan Dadbar, Tel: +994503246259, ifirbaku@yahoo.com; **Belgium:** Hossein Pesh Ehsan, Tel: + 32 478 904 163, ifirbe@hotmail.com; **Canada:** Siamak Amjadi, Siamak_Amjadi@Yahoo.Ca; **Denmark:** Mahmoud Gasvini, Tel: +45 2049 3098, nahid@mail.danbbs.dk; **England:** Saeed Arman, Tel: +44 7931866985, s.arman@ukonline.co.uk; **Finland:** Amir Tavakoli, Tel: +358 405821776, tavakoli@hotmail.com; **Germany:** Nasrin Ramzanali, Tel: +49 172 5350946, ifirgermany@web.de; **Greece:** Surush Naurasi, +31619766998, ifir@ukonline.co.uk; **India:** Abbas Rezaei and Ghafor Zareen, +31619766998, ifir@ukonline.co.uk; **Norway:** Ghafar Gholamveysi, Tel: +47 40851738, ghafar@chello.no; **Sweden:** Esmaeil Moloodi, Tel: +46 70 492 0349, ifrs@hotmail.com; **Switzerland:** Mahmood Rahbary, Tel. +41 78 795 75 81, m_rahbary@hotmail.com; **Turkey:** Morad Shaikh, +31619766998, ifir@ukonline.co.uk; **United States:** Afsaneh Rahimi, Tel: +1 310 413 1578, RahimiA2000@yahoo.com

IFIR Contacts:

Maryam Namazie, **Executive Director**
Keyvan Javid, **Deputy Executive Director**

Visit IFIR site for latest
international refugee news,
urgent actions and press
releases:

www.hambastegi.org

Editor: Maryam Namazie

Translators: Nasser Asgary and Laili Panahi

E-mail: ifir@ukonline.co.uk

Tel: +44 7730 107 337; **Fax:** +44 8701351303

P.O. Box 27236, London N11 2ZF, England

www.hambastegi.org