

# HAMBASTEGI

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## Another small victory against detention! It's not enough!

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Under massive international and national pressure, the Australian government has partially backed down on the issue of detention of asylum seekers. Under new guidelines released by Immigration Minister Philip Ruddock, unaccompanied minors will now be placed in foster care and women with children will be offered an 'alternative' to living in high-

security detention centres. Also, the Australian government has reported that it will shut down Woomera detention centre as soon as possible. As Hambastegi readers know, Woomera has been labelled the worst detention centre in Australia for its human rights abuses and has been the scene of intense opposition by the International Federation of Iranian Refugees, asylum seekers, refugee rights activists and others nationally and internationally.



The release of women and children from detention and the shutting down of Woomera are critical gains and show just how important protesting, raising public awareness and mobilising support for asylum seekers

is. We must keep this pressure on and escalate it. We must keep organising positive forms of protest including demonstrations, sit-ins, speaking tours, caravans and public meetings to gain public

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## Asylum News and Analysis

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**41 Afghan refugee children have died as a result of cold:** From 4 December until now, 41 Afghan refugee children have died as a result of the sub-zero cold in three makeshift camps along the Pakistani border. 1200 children under eight are at serious risk of dying. In this

cold, more than 100,000 people living in camps along the border lack proper warm clothes and adequate shelter.

This is a painful tragedy in this region. If this happens to one British or American soldier, it will create uproar and those responsible will be held accountable but when the lives of tens of thousands of asylum seekers and thousands of innocent children are threatened, no one is made accountable. This is the fate of the victims whose lives have been caught between Islamic and USA terrorism. The Pa-

kistani government as well as the UNHCR are responsible for this great human tragedy. Afghan refugees must be given proper shelter and protection.

**Torture of asylum seekers by Australian soldiers:** According to a recently published Human Rights Watch report, asylum seekers were beaten with electric batons, subdued with capsicum spray and kept in excessively cramped conditions below deck on boats intercepted by the Australian navy last year. In its 94-page report, the organisation said Australian

soldiers threatened to shoot asylum seekers, denied hospital treatment to a woman bleeding severely after childbirth, and deserted barely seaworthy vessels in high seas just beyond Indonesia. The report disputes the Australian Federal Government's assumption that asylum seekers could receive effective protection in countries where they first sought asylum, such as Iran and Pakistan, or that they could obtain protection in countries they passed through en route, such as Indonesia and Malaysia. The report also notes that two female asylum seekers died

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## Another small victory against detention, from page 1

support in Australia and internationally. We must organise escapes and break-and-pull down detention centre barbed wire walls (as was done at Woomera) and so on.

Yet while the partial retreat of the Australian government is significant, it is in no way enough. It is not enough for the Australian government to release women and children. It is not enough for them to shut down Woomera. It is not even enough for them to end the policy of mandatory detention. The Australian government must completely end its policy of detaining asylum seekers and shut down all its detention centres. It must end the so-called Pacific solution and allow asylum seekers entry into Australia. It must pay reparations to all those it has interned and mentally and physically abused. (We recently received news that the Badraies, parents of Shayan, a seven-year-old Iranian boy

who was seriously traumatised and mentally scarred by two years in detention will launch a \$750,000 legal action against the Immigration Minister and his department for Shayan's pain and suffering and the costs of ongoing psychiatric counselling.) The Australian government must give in to an independent inquiry to investigate the extent of its abuses and that of private companies like the ACM that have been managing centres and abused rights. The Australian government must officially and publicly concede wrongdoing. The Immigration Minister Ruddock and Prime Minister Howard must resign.

Of course, whether or not these happen, depend on us. Human beings, within progressive movements, make change for the better, not governments. Will we be able to force the Australian government to a complete

retreat? Can we make the law on detaining asylum seekers as much of an outrage in public opinion as the Australian government's 1930s law which allowed Aboriginal 'half-caste' children to be removed from their homes and transported to 're-education' centres where they were trained as domestic workers in order to 'integrate' them?

There are many factors involved in whether we can succeed but there are several important ones that need to be mentioned here. One is that the protest we continue to organise must be a positive and international one. We mustn't allow asylum seekers to harm and mutilate themselves in the ensuing protests. In defence of asylum rights, too, advocates mustn't use backward and negative methods such as hunger strikes or symbolic mutilations just as they wouldn't use these methods

say in defence of a firefighters' strike. The working class must intervene in this struggle as a struggle that affects all of society. We must never compromise on people's rights. We must call detention and detention centres what they are. Detention is a sanitised name for imprisoning innocent people who have committed no crime. Detention centres are concentration camps. These centres are nothing but symbols of state racism (while the Australian government has conceded that most 'illegal' immigrants are British, it is the 'easterners' that are locked up like animals). They are nothing but institutions of state-sponsored violence under legal cover. Clearly, detaining innocent people who have fled persecution, violations, political Islam and countries like Iran, Iraq and Afghanistan, even for an hour is a crime. On these we must not compromise.

## Stop Executions in Iran

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](mailto: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](mailto:ifir@ukonline.co.uk).



### 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.'

## Asylum News and Analysis, from page 1

in the course of an interception operation on October 8, 2001, which is now the subject of an inquiry.

This report reiterates what the International Federation of Iranian Refugees and other advocates have been saying for a long while. It clearly shows that there is no difference between the threats and suppressions of Australian soldiers and the police and security forces in Iran, Iraq, etc. The nature and essence of both are the same. In both, human beings have no place in their system and policies. Therefore, you can be beaten, abused, and denied your basic rights. The situation in Australia places additional tasks before us. We must bring an end to violations of asylum rights. It is a difficult task but one that is vitally important in today's world.

**Denmark to slash payments to asylum seekers:** The Danish government is planning to cut allowances for asylum seekers by a quarter, threatening even lower allowances if refugees refuse to work in asylum centres.

This new anti-asylum policy is a policy which has already been defeated in the UK. In 2000, the British government introduced a voucher scheme but was forced to scrap the discredited scheme in February 2002 and replace it by cash payments on 8 April 2002. This was a significant victory for the asylum and anti-racist movement. The UK government's retreat was made possible only after a massive and collective struggle on the part of progressive and freedom loving people and groups in that 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 have to be victorious in Denmark too. If European governments reproduce anti-asylum policies, human and civil rights activists will reproduce their successful experiences and struggles. This is not just a Danish struggle. Any struggle on asylum and civil rights is a universal one. The Danish government must be defeated as well.

**Greece's new asylum regulation is anti-human:** According to recent Greek regulation, asylum seekers entering Greece illegally are to be subject to arrest, imprisonment and fines, despite the fact that most asylum seekers are forced to flee persecution without proper documents. Those

unable to pay the fine are to remain in prison until deported to their countries of origin. Imprisoning and fining asylum seekers are a travesty of justice and a violation of the rights of asylum seekers. These new regulations in Greece only serve to humiliate and swindle asylum seekers and deny them access to determination procedures. Because of this regulation, many asylum seekers are languishing in prisons.

Following the IFIR's campaign in defence of 8 Iranian asylum seekers imprisoned under this regulation, the Greek government contacted the said asylum seekers and told them they could apply for asylum if they wished! We must expose this policy even further so that the Greek government ends its policy of detention and extortion.

## Immigrant Rights Work in an International Perspective

Talk and discussion with Maryam Namazie, IFIR Executive Director

**Tuesday, December 17 at 6:30 pm**

**Community Service Society of New York, 105 East 22nd Street, Room 4A**

(Northeast corner of Park Avenue - entrance on 22nd Street, by subway, take the number 6 train to the 23rd Street stop in Manhattan)

Since passage of several harsh immigration laws in 1996, the U.S. has vastly increased detention and deportation of immigrants in this country, including asylum seekers, legal permanent residents convicted of crimes, and since the September 11 attacks, those with minor visa violations. Racial profiling is currently being used to concentrate the enforcement on certain communities, and as a whole the detention and deportation policies are largely impacting immigrants from the poorer nations. Yet this crackdown on immigrants is not unique to the United States. It is part of a broader trend affecting migrants throughout the world, and very evident in Europe.

Call Lara Rabiee at (212) 614-5337 for more information.

**Sponsored by the Coalition for the Human Rights of Immigrants (CHRI)**

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urgent actions and press  
releases:

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