

Waiting Time: A human tragedy that tears down the awaited person's sinews every second

A phone interview with three Iranian and Afghan striker refugees in front of UN Office in Van, Turkey

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“By virtue of its position on the crossroads between Europe, the Middle East, Asia and Africa, millions of people travel to or through Turkey for economic reasons, or to flee persecution in their home countries. Quite often, they transit through or reside in Turkey illegally. Turkey maintains a geographic reservation to the 1951 Refugee Convention. However, in accordance with Turkey's status as a candidate for membership of the European Union (EU), the Government has committed itself to harmonizing its legislation with that of the EU on asylum and related areas, such as migration, border management and administrative and judicial reform. UNHCR continues to assess the claims of non-European asylum-seekers. For these individuals, UNHCR conducts refugee status determination (RSD) under its mandate, and pursues durable solutions, primarily resettlement, for those found to be in need of international protection. For recognized refugees, an additional period of up to 15 months or more may be required to find a resettlement opportunity¹”.

This table shows the statistics of the refugees and asylum seekers from the different countries in Turkey in 2011. This table has been taken from UNHCR website.

According to the statistics, after war-torn Iraq, Iran has the largest number of asylum seekers in Turkey.

2011 UNHCR planning figures for Turkey					
TYPE OF POPULATION	ORIGIN	JAN 2011		DEC 2011	
		TOTAL IN COUNTRY	OF WHOM ASSISTED BY UNHCR	TOTAL IN COUNTRY	OF WHOM ASSISTED BY UNHCR
Refugees	Islamic Rep. of Iran	3,000	3,000	4,800	4,800
	Iraq	6,600	6,600	6,700	6,700
	Afghanistan	2,200	2,200	3,300	3,300
	Various	2,200	2,200	2,100	2,100
Asylum-seekers	Islamic Rep. of Iran	1,800	1,800	3,000	3,000
	Iraq	1,700	1,700	300	300
	Afghanistan	2,500	2,500	2,000	2,000
Returnees (refugees)	Turkey	1,800	1,800	1,700	1,700
		500	500	500	500
		964,000	0	964,000	0
Stateless	Stateless	5,000	0	5,000	0
Total		991,300	22,300	993,400	24,400

Here, there are some momentous questions: Has UN been successful in performing its duties in regard to reduce the waiting period between decisions and finding a safe country for the recognized refugees? Does UN provide the recognized refugees with financial support, including housing supply and health care? Are the living conditions of asylum seekers in Turkey consistent with human rights law? What situation do these recognized refugees live in before transferring to a safe country? Why are these refugees forced to commit actions such as food strike and put their lives in danger to drive the international attention to their situations? If UN provided them with living expenses, housing, and health care, would the refugees attempt to hunger strike?

A brief glance to the refugees housing, work, physical health, and children's situation in Turkey shows that even the positive decision of the UN regarding the refugees' case cannot change the living conditions of the refugees (which is full of danger, stress, poverty, and physical threats). These refugees have no shelter. To pay for their lives expenses, they have to work hard with the lowest income, which are not even enough to pay their daily expenses.

Which human rights organization is responsible for the living conditions of refugees worldwide, especially in Turkey? Obviously, all the refugees' institutions and human rights organizations are responsible for the refugees' support; and the silence of these institutions and human rights organizations will be a stigma on their foreheads.

In an interview with three hunger strikers (Iranians: Poria and Saadi; Afghan: Soraya) in front of the UN Office in Van, Turkey in 2011 04 03, they revealed that it is between 2 to 4 years that these recognized refugees are waiting for the UN to find a safe country for them to be transferred to. However, this waiting period has been too longer than what UN promised. According to the UN, the



period in which the UN should find a country for them is “15 months or more”, but “more” can be 2 years? 3 years? 4 years? Some of these hunger strikers have been waiting about 4 years and have no persuading explanation from the UN.

Poria (case number: 06c8/1/2009 01317) says that it is 2 years and 6 months that he is waiting for the UN to find a safe country for him. During this period, the UN did not support him with health care and housing.

Soraya (case number: 08c10/3/2009 04745) is an Afghan woman who fled from her country about three years ago. She is living with her two children in Turkey; and it is two years that she and her children have positive answer from the UN and waiting to be transferred to a country. She says that UN pays only 190 Lira Turkey per month; however this amount is not even enough to pay her house rent. Soraya and her children suffer from hunger. They cannot eat well. She works as a maidservant in people’s houses; and her income is too low to pay for food and clothing.

Saadi (case number: 06c17/9/2008 01178) got his positive answer from the UN in 2008. He asked the UN authorities why they had not been able to find a country for his residence yet; however, the UN only answers that no countries accepts you! He asks how a country can know about me if the UN does not send my case for them. Saadi suffers from physical problems on his knee and cannot walk well.

Hamzeh (case number: 05c13/6/2007 00834) was sent to the I.C.U dept. of the hospital for two days. The doctors said he was in danger of heart failure.

The physical conditions of all the strikers are critical. Some of them have been sent to hospital more than one time and have gone back to the strike place again. They are determined to get a persuasive answer from the UN authorities. They said that they would continue to hunger strike till the UN finds a safe country for them.

We believe that the UN is responsible for the recognized refugees to find a safe country for them as soon as possible. If these strikers have any serious physical problems, it will be the UN which is responsible for. In the light of these circumstances, the serious nature of the problems they

exposed to, and the refugees' children situation, we urge the authorities to find the best solution for them as soon as possible.

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Work Cited:

1. <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/txis/vtx/page?page=49e48e0fa7f>