



## **AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT**

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### **Israel: Government urged to allow all from Syria seeking refuge to enter Golan Heights**

Amnesty International has written to the Israeli Minister of Defence Ehud Barak raising concerns about quotes which appeared in media reports on 19 July attributed to the Minister, stating his intention to prevent refugees fleeing increasing violence and wide-spread human rights abuses in Syria, from entering Israel via the Israeli-occupied area of the Golan Heights. The Golan Heights - home to tens of thousands of Israeli nationals – was occupied by Israel in 1967 though it is internationally recognized as Syrian territory.

Ehud Barak's statement is particularly concerning since it was made in light of a severe escalation in the level of violence across Syria following an attack on 18 July which killed the Syrian Defence Minister; his deputy; the Assistant Vice-President; and the Head of National Security in Damascus.

Amnesty International urged Ehud Barak to take necessary steps to ensure that anyone fleeing Syria – where all the evidence suggests that crimes against humanity and war crimes are being committed on a mass scale against the population - be allowed to benefit from effective and systematic protection procedures and safeguards to prevent their forcible return to Syria where they may face serious human rights abuses including torture and other ill-treatment, unlawful killing, prolonged incommunicado detention.

Such forcible returns would amount to refoulement. Israel has an obligation to protect all individuals against refoulement (as enshrined under international refugee law, including the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol). This requires that the authorities allow individuals full access to protection - any actions or omissions on their part which result in anyone in flight being rejected at the Syrian/Israeli-controlled Golan Heights border would constitute refoulement in violation of Israel's international obligations.

The principle of non-refoulement may have extra-territorial application and thus can include obligations on state officials who are operating on the territory of a third state such as in the context of occupation and in turn the Israeli-occupied area of the Golan Heights. The organization urged Ehud Barak to ensure that the Israeli authorities uphold their international obligations and allow anyone fleeing Syria and seeking refuge entry to the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights.

Amnesty International has also addressed its campaigning efforts to other countries which neighbour Syria and which continue to host tens of thousands of refugees from Syria, including Jordan, Turkey and Lebanon. Today António Guterres, the United Nations High Commissioner

for Refugees, voiced his concern at the numbers fleeing Syria and expressed his extreme gratitude to Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq and Turkey for maintaining open borders.

### **Background**

Amnesty International has raised concerns in the past about Israel's treatment of asylum seekers and refugees, including longstanding concerns about the lack of fairness, consistency and transparency in its Refugee Status Determination (RSD) system. As a result of these failures, since the establishment of Israel in 1948, and despite the fact that there are over 50,000 asylum-seekers in the country today, less than 200 individuals have been granted refugee status, which is less than 1 per cent of all applicants.

Furthermore, in January 2012, the Israeli parliament passed the "Prevention of Infiltration Law", which mandates the automatic detention of anyone, including asylum-seekers, who enters Israel without permission (all such people are labelled "infiltrators" under the law). The law allows for all such detainees to be held without charge or trial for three or more years. People from countries considered "hostile" to Israel, including asylum-seekers from Darfur in Sudan, could be detained indefinitely. Read more at:

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE15/043/2011/en> and  
<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE15/020/2012/en> .

Public Document

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