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UK/Afghanistan: Forced return of Afghan asylum-seekers unacceptable

Amnesty International today strongly condemned the UK government's decision to forcibly return a group of asylum-seekers to Afghanistan whose claims have been rejected by the UK authorities.

"Given the complexities and challenges in ensuring the sustainability of return, the timing of returns should be informed by human rights standards," the organization stated.

An Amnesty International mission to Afghanistan in April concluded that conditions are still not conducive to the promotion of voluntary return, much less forced returns. It found a lack of coherent assistance, reintegration, and monitoring capacity for refugees returning to urban as well as other areas.

It pointed in particular to serious problems of sustainability of returns, highlighting continuing denial of economic, social and cultural rights as well as a grave lack of security.

"Lack of security in the country, including in Kabul and in spite of the presence of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), is still a serious problem. This is particularly so in western Kabul where many refugees are settling, and where ISAF has a more limited effect and presence on the ground," Amnesty International emphasized. "Afghanistan is not in a post-conflict situation, and there is no rule of law."

The organization also expressed concern at the suggestion that the forced return of this group of people was motivated by 'symbolism'.

"Returns for 'symbolic' purposes are dangerous because they are motivated by public perception rather than a cool-headed and objective assessment of the reality on the ground," the organization said.

"Instead of pushing for 'symbolic' returns, the UK government should be concentrating on helping to create the conditions for a genuinely safe Afghanistan, including one where the rule of law is actually upheld."

Amnesty International maintains its position that non-voluntary returns should not take place unless safety, dignity and full respect for human rights can be assured.

Amnesty International seeks comprehensive assurances from the UK government that international human rights standards will be upheld during the course of the asylum -seekers' return, and

that adequate provision will be made for effective and ongoing monitoring of their human rights post-return.

Relevant Amnesty International's publications and statements:

Afghanistan: Amnesty International's recommendations regarding refugee returns,
<http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engasa110012003>, from 1 January 2003.

Afghanistan: Continuing need for Protection and Standards for Return of Afghan refugees,
<http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engasa110142002>, from 25 July 2002.

Afghanistan: Police reconstruction essential for the protection of human rights,
<http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engasa110032003>, from 12 March 2003

Afghanistan: Human rights concerns: a message from NGOs to donors,
<http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engasa110012003>, from 18 December 2002

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