

URGENT ACTION

PALESTINIAN HELD IN AIRPORT RISKS DEPORTATION

Palestinian refugee from Syria Mohamed Ajlani Younes has been held arbitrarily and in poor conditions since 26 May in the new Istanbul Airport. The Turkish authorities are not processing his asylum application and he is at imminent risk of deportation to Lebanon, where he is in danger of further removal to Syria.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

Director General Abdullah Ayaz
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Dear Director,

Mohamed Ajlani Younes, a Palestinian refugee from Syria, has been held in the transit zone of Istanbul Airport since 26 May. I believe there are at times up to 50 others also held in this area. He is not allowed to enter Turkish territory to seek protection as a refugee and have his case duly assessed. He has been held for over a month in an area that is designed for short stays, with no access to adequate food, natural light or open air, no privacy and limited medical assistance.

Mohamed Ajlani Younes's asylum application in Turkey has not been decided and there is no formal deportation decision against him. Despite this, he continues to be detained and there have been two attempts to deport him to Lebanon, the most recent on 21 June, when he was flown to Lebanon but refused entry into the country by the Lebanese authorities and brought back to Istanbul. He remains at risk of return to Lebanon.

Deporting Mohamed Ajlani Younes to Lebanon would put him in danger of being sent to Syria, a country that is not safe and where he would be at risk of serious human rights violations. This would be in breach of Turkey's obligations under international law. Furthermore, as a Palestinian refugee from Syria, if returned to Lebanon he would be exposed to dire living conditions which in themselves may violate his rights.

In light of the above, I urge you to:

- **Immediately release Mohamed Ajlani Younes from detention and grant him access to the Turkish territory;**
- **Immediately grant him effective access to protection procedures as a refugee in Turkey and to protect him and others in the transit zone of Istanbul airport from return decisions that may expose them to serious human rights violations.**

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Mohamed Ajlani Younes is a Palestinian refugee from Syria. In 2012 he fled Syria and moved to Lebanon, where he lived in the Shatila refugee camp with his wife and two children, who continue to reside in the camp. After leaving Lebanon, on 26 May 2019 he was stopped in Istanbul airport, allegedly for travelling with a fake passport, and denied entry into Turkey. On 28 May he made an application for asylum in Turkey expressing his fears about being returned to Lebanon. Asylum seekers should not be penalised for illegal entry in a country where they seek protection, as long as they present themselves without delay to the authorities showing good cause for it (Art 31 of the Refugee Convention). According to UNHCR, failing to meet documentation requirements should not automatically result in asylum seekers being detained. Despite this, Mohamed Ajlani Younes continues to be detained in the transit zone of Istanbul airport, at times being held with up to 50 other people. The area offers inadequate sleeping facilities, no access to open air or natural light and 24hrs artificial lighting. Medical assistance is limited and inadequate. For the duration of his stay, he has only been fed cheese sandwiches and water or juice, which led him to develop stomach issues. When he resisted a first attempt to deport him, on 11 June, he says that he was kept in handcuffs for approximately four hours.

To date, Mohamed Ajlani Younes has not yet had his asylum interview and no formal decision has been taken on his application. So far there have been two attempts to deport him. On the second attempt, on 21 June, Turkish authorities returned him to Lebanon while his asylum application was pending and without a formal deportation decision. He was flown to Lebanon and spent the night at the airport there, but the Lebanese authorities refused to admit him into the country on grounds that he was lacking a valid document. On 25 June, Mohamed Ajlani Younes's lawyer made a request for interim measures to Turkey's Constitutional Court requesting protection against the risk of new deportations. No decision has yet been made on this request.

Without his protection needs being duly assessed by Turkey, Mohamed Ajlani Younes is at imminent risk of return to Lebanon, where he would face dire living conditions and be at risk of *chain-refoulement* to Syria and exposed to serious human rights violations. The principle of *non-refoulement* is codified in Turkey's Law on Foreigners and International Protection (LFIP) and other international human rights instruments binding on Turkey, including the Refugee Convention and the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR).

Amnesty International wrote to the Turkish Directorate General for Migration Management (DGMM) on 29 June to ask for clarification on Mohamed Ajlani Younes' situation and raise concerns about the risk that he might be returned to Lebanon. To date, no response has been received.

As of 2019 there are 938,531 Syrian refugees and 31,000 Palestinian refugees from Syria registered with UNRWA in Lebanon. In March 2019, Lebanese General Security announced that 172,046 refugees had returned to Syria since December 2017 due to easing administrative restrictions and facilitating and organizing returns. Civilians returning to Syria are requested to go through a "security clearance" involving interrogation by Syrian security forces responsible for widespread and systematic human rights violations and abuses constituting crimes against humanity, including the use of torture, extrajudicial executions and enforced disappearances. Amnesty recently reported on the deteriorating conditions and mounting hostility in Lebanon against refugees from Syria and believes that the coercive environment created by the Lebanese authorities is forcing them to return to Syria, in breach of Lebanon's obligations under the *non-refoulement* principle, which forbids the transfer of individuals to a country where they would face serious human rights violations.

Amnesty also documented the particularly vulnerable situation of Palestinian refugees from Syria in Lebanon, as it is the case for Mohamed Ajlani Younes. The increase in arrivals after the Syrian conflict led to a deterioration of the infrastructure and services available to this group. By December 2016, almost 90% of the 32,000 Palestinian refugees from Syria registered with UNRWA in Lebanon lived below the poverty line and 95% of them were described as "food insecure". Palestinian refugees in Lebanon have also been subject to discriminatory laws in several public areas.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: English and Turkish.

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 19 August 2019

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: Mohamed Ajlani Younes (he/his)