

URGENT ACTION

SYRIANS STILL RISK DEPORTATION FROM TURKEY

Syrian refugees are still at risk of deportation from Turkey, and the Turkish authorities may implement plans to force large numbers of them to a so-called “safe zone” in northern Syria. This is an active conflict zone, as evidenced by Turkey’s own recent military action in the north-eastern part of the country in October 2019.

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

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Dear Minister,

I am writing to express serious concern about the recent treatment of Syrian refugees in Turkey and the potential implementation of longstanding plans to unlawfully relocate people to a so-called “safe zone” in northern Syria.

I recognize and appreciate that your country is the world’s largest host of refugees, at around 4 million people. But this admirable generosity does not absolve your government of its obligation to respect international law and protect the rights of the people under its jurisdiction – including refugees from Syria.

In a comprehensive briefing published on 25 October 2019 (see here: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur44/1102/2019/en/>), Amnesty International showed that in mid-2019 it is likely that hundreds of Syrian refugees across Turkey were apprehended, detained, and deported against their will, usually after being coerced or misled into signing so-called “voluntary return” documents. Those who manage to re-enter Turkey find that their Turkish identification documents have been cancelled. Syrians without valid identification documents are unable to access essential services and are at heightened risk of deportation or re-deportation. It appears impossible to renew these documents after they are cancelled, even though renewal is allowed under Turkish law. Syrian refugees are often left without legal recourse or remedy to protect themselves against being deported.

I am also deeply concerned about the Turkish authorities’ longstanding plans to relocate large numbers of Syrian refugees to the northern part of Syria, on the false basis that this area is currently safe. Syria remains one of the world’s most dangerous countries. For example, the Turkish authorities’ most recent military action in north-eastern Syria, beginning on 9 October 2019, precipitated the movement of 160,000 people fleeing hostilities. The north-western part of the country has recently been described as a “humanitarian nightmare.”

Deporting anyone to Syria violates the international law principle of non-refoulement, as it puts them at risk of serious human rights violations.

I urge you to immediately stop deporting Syrian refugees, ensure that those whose identification documents have expired or been cancelled are able to renew them, and investigate all allegations of deportations to Syria. I also urge you to stop any plans to relocate Syrian refugees to a so-called “safe zone.”

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Turkey is the world's largest host of refugees, presently at about 4 million, most of them (over 3.6 million) from Syria. In theory, all Syrians in Turkey are granted "Temporary Protection" status, but they must register and receive identification documents in order to access essential services, including healthcare and education. Turkey has spent billions of Euros hosting this population, with some financial support from the European Union (EU).

Despite claims to the contrary by Turkey and the EU, Turkey is not a safe refuge for refugees and asylum seekers. Amnesty International as well as other organizations have received credible and consistent evidence of deportations to Syria between 2014 and 2018 and most recently in mid-2019. *Refoulement*, or deporting someone to a risk of serious human rights violations, is prohibited under both Turkish law and international law instruments to which Turkey is a signatory.

At present, all deportations to Syria are illegal, because of the nature and severity of the human rights risks there. The civil war that has wrecked Syria since 2011 has caused incalculable destruction and driven millions of women, men and children from their homes. Of those, 5.6 million have fled the country, while over 6 million people are displaced within Syria. In September 2019 the situation in Idlib province in north-western Syria, into which over 3 million Syrians had fled from other parts of the country, was described by aid groups as a "humanitarian nightmare." Amnesty International has documented multiple unlawful attacks on Idlib by the Syrian government, supported by Russia, on hospitals, schools, bakeries, and residential homes between January and June 2019.

Turkey itself has engaged in military action in Syria: "Operation Euphrates Shield" in northern Aleppo province in 2016 and "Operation Olive Branch" in Afrin province beginning in 2018. Most recently on 9 October 2019, Turkey launched the so-called "Operation Peace Spring" offensive into north-eastern Syria. Turkey and Syrian armed groups under its control entered territory held by a Kurdish-led alliance of armed groups, previously allied and supported by the US. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reported on 15 October that in the previous six days alone, over 160,000 people in north-eastern Syria had been displaced, fleeing military advances and hostilities. Amnesty International documented summary killings and unlawful attacks carried out by Turkish forces and a coalition of Turkey-backed Syrian armed groups. The Turkish authorities deny that anyone is returned to Syria against their will, claiming that 365,000 Syrians have voluntarily returned to what is one of the world's most dangerous countries.

A few people do return to Syria on a truly voluntary basis, usually temporarily, for instance to bring back elderly relatives or renew passports. They were not informed of the consequences of leaving Turkey, and after their re-entry, have found that their Temporary Protection status was cancelled. For those whose status has been cancelled it appears impossible to renew it, regardless of how the loss occurred (for instance whether the return was forced or truly voluntary, or if the ID documents simply expired). However, Turkish law (Circular 7 January 2019) permits those who have lost their status to renew it.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: English and Turkish.

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 26 December 2019

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

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur44/1117/2019/en/>