

Somalis denied refuge

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Thousands of Somali asylum-seekers and refugees have been left stranded by Kenya's decision to close the border with its war-torn neighbour. The decision has put asylum-seekers and refugees at risk of grave human rights violations.

Kenya closed its border with Somalia on 3 January 2007, citing 'security concerns' in the wake of the resurgence of Somalia's armed conflict. On the same day, at least 420 Somalis, who had already crossed into Kenya and were waiting at the transit centre in Liboi, were forcibly returned to Somalia by Kenyan authorities. Since then, thousands more Somali asylum-seekers have been unable to cross the border into Kenya and exercise their right to seek refuge from the violence that has soared since June 2006.

For the estimated 2,000 asylum-seekers who have managed to cross the border, there are additional risks and hardship along the way. Hiking through the bush exposes families to the threat of killings, rape and torture by armed groups. Those who make it to the Kenyan refugee camps in Dadaab live in fear of being sent back, if it is discovered they arrived after the border closure.

Among those trying to escape Somalia on the day of the closure was Khadija, a 24-year-old mother of four.

She told Amnesty International: "We were driven back to Somalia and dropped in the middle of nowhere. Some of us decided to come back to Kenya illegally, through the bush."

When her group encountered a low-flying helicopter, thought to be Kenyan security forces: "There was confusion and panic and everyone started running to hide. I lost all my children and have not been able to trace any of them," said Khadija, who also lost contact with her husband since he went in search of their children.

The right to seek international protection in another country is enshrined in international law. Kenya's refusal to allow Somalis through its border is a violation of its international obligations, including a breach of the 1951 UN Refugee Convention to which Kenya is a state party. The Kenyan government must re-open the border immediately and ensure that all individuals seeking refuge in the country have access to proper and effective protection.

Read the full report:

Denied refuge: The effect of the closure of the Kenya/Somalia border on thousands of Somali asylum-seekers and refugees

Further info:

[Kenya: Thousands of Somali refugees and asylum-seekers denied refuge](#) (public statement)

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Caption: real player version