

AI Index: PRE 01/247/2008  
14 October 2008

## **Turkey/Iran: Act now to protect refugees**

For the second time in one month Turkish law enforcement officials have expelled the same group of Uzbekistani refugees into Iranian territory in flagrant disregard for international standards protecting the rights of refugees and asylum-seekers.

Amnesty International is calling on the Turkish authorities to conduct a prompt and impartial investigation into the circumstances of the illegal deportation of the 24 refugees, including children, from Van in eastern Turkey to Iran. The organization is concerned that there is no information regarding their whereabouts and well-being.

"This illegal deportation has gone ahead in violation of international standards which grant protection to recognised refugees and asylum seekers whilst their claims are determined. The government should make sure this kind of deportation does not happen again," said Nicola Duckworth, Europe and Central Asia Programme Director at Amnesty International said.

On Saturday 11 October, the 24 Uzbekistani nationals are believed to have been rounded up by Turkish police in Van and taken to an unknown location. Despite the efforts of human rights organisations in Turkey throughout Saturday night and Sunday, it was not possible to secure their release. On Monday 13 October, the UN's refugee agency (UNHCR) in Turkey confirmed that the group had been deported to Iran.

A month ago, on 12 September, 21 of the 24 Uzbekistani refugees were forced into Iranian territory by Turkish law enforcement officials. During this first deportation, members of the group were allegedly beaten up and women and girls threatened with rape unless they left Turkey. The refugees were subsequently held hostage by an unnamed group in Iran which threatened to kill them. They were released after a week following the payment of a ransom of \$5,000, allowing them to return irregularly to Turkey.

"After all that they have been through, these refugees returned to Turkey in the belief that they would be safe. Instead they are again in danger in Iran."

"The Iranian authorities must undertake to ensure their safety in Iran. Furthermore, the authorities must not send them back to Uzbekistan where they are at risk of torture and other ill-treatment."