

TURKEY/IRAN Arzu Ghaffari, aged 38, Iranian asylum-seeker
Akram Homayoonpoor (his wife), aged 39 and their children Pouyan Ghaffari (m),
aged 14, Behrang Ghaffari (m), aged 11 and Saba Ghaffari
(f), aged 9.

Asylum-seekers Arzu Ghaffari, Akram Homayoonpoor and their three children are facing forcible repatriation to Iran, where Arzu Ghaffari, and possibly his wife, would be at risk of serious human rights violations, possibly including torture.

The Interior Ministry decided to forcibly return the family after the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNCHR) rejected their application for refugee status for a second time, on 2 November, in a procedure Amnesty International believes was flawed.

Arzu Ghaffari is a former political prisoner and torture victim, held in Tabriz prison in Iran because of his anti-government activities. He fled to Turkey in 1996, a year after his wife and children. The family were given temporary residence permits as asylum-seekers, which were withdrawn after the UNCHR rejected their applications for refugee status. When Arzu Ghaffari was arrested in connection with a traffic accident in September 1999 and threatened with immediate deportation, the UNCHR reopened the family's case, but rejected their application again on 2 November. The police then arrested Akram Homayoonpoor and the children. Since then the family have been under arrest at the Foreigners' Bureau of the Istanbul Police headquarters, awaiting deportation.

Amnesty International has expressed its concerns about Arzu Ghaffari's application for refugee status on three occasions to the field office of the UNHCR in Ankara, the determining body in this case. The UNHCR has told Amnesty International that it believes Mr Ghaffari does not meet the Convention definition of a refugee, and so should no longer enjoy the protection of the UNHCR and thus can be forcibly returned to Iran.

This uncertain situation has put considerable strain on the couple's marriage and the well-being of the whole family. Arzu Ghaffari recently had a nervous breakdown, caused by the post-traumatic stress disorder resulting from the physical and mental torture he has suffered. The family have a long-standing application for Turkish citizenship, which might be favourably considered in the light of Arzu Ghaffari's and Akram Homayoonpoor's professional skills and experience, as a car mechanic and a teacher respectively, and their children's excellent academic records. Family friends have started a petition asking the Turkish Human Rights Commission and Interior Ministry to urgently examine the family's application.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/faxes/express/airmail letters in English or your own language:

- urging the Turkish authorities not to forcibly return Arzu Ghaffari, Akram Homayoonpoor and their children, Pouyan, Behrang and Saba, to Iran, where the parents would be at risk of serious human rights violations;
- urging the Turkish authorities to respect their obligation under international law not forcibly return people to countries where they would be at risk of serious human rights violations including torture and inhuman or degrading treatment;

- urging that the family's long-standing application for Turkish citizenship be speedily examined, taking into account the support shown to them by friends, acquaintances and sympathisers, as evidenced by the petition.

APPEALS TO:

Prime Minister

Mr Bülent Ecevit

Office of the Prime Minister

Basbakanlik, 06573 Ankara, Turkey

Telegrams: Prime Minister, Ankara, Turkey

Faxes: + 90 312 417 0476

Salutation: Dear Prime Minister

Minister of the Interior

Mr Saadettin Tantan

İçisleri Bakani

İçisleri Bakanligi, 06644 Ankara, Turkey

Telegrams: İçisleri Bakani, Ankara, Turkey

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Salutation: Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

State Minister with responsibility for Human Rights

Mr Mehmet Ali İrtemçelik

Office of the Prime Minister

Basbakanlik

06573 Ankara, Turkey

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Salutation: Dear Minister

and to diplomatic representatives of Turkey and Iran accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 3 December 1999.