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Return to Kosovo: not a solution for all

“I am too old to go anywhere else, it was very difficult for me to travel here and to come to the border. I just want God to take me.”

(A 92-year-old refugee in a camp in Macedonia)

Even as the official UNHCR programme to return refugees to parts of Kosovo deemed safe begins, many who are unable to go are in urgent need of an alternative, Amnesty International said in a new field report launched today.

As thousands of refugees pour back into Kosovo, some through organized returns, some spontaneously, Amnesty International called for particular attention to be paid to the needs of refugees who are too vulnerable to go back.

“Provision should be made to protect the elderly, women and children alone, the disabled and people requiring medical attention, including victims of torture,” the organization said.

“All refugees should be provided with more information to allow them to make an informed choice about return and the rights to which they are entitled.”

Following the announcement that the Humanitarian Evacuation Programme has ended, Amnesty International is stressing that there is still a need for a similar programme to provide for the protection needs of vulnerable refugees. Those refugees who cannot yet return should continue to benefit from asylum in Macedonia, or be resettled in other countries or be integrated in host countries.

In its new field report, Amnesty international highlights the difficulties faced by refugees in recent weeks due to lack of proper information that would allow them to make an informed decision about return. The report also includes the following recommendations to ensure that the international community continues to protect refugees still unable to return:

The international community should continue to provide protection to those refugees unable to return to Kosovo in the immediate future.

Refugees should be provided with individual refugee identity documents, which would be valid documentation for benefiting from further protection programmes.

Refugees should be provided with adequate information about available protection programmes.

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*** The following people will be available for interviews: Refugee Officers, Leanne MacMillan and Saul Takahashi, who will be in Geneva for the EXCOM Meeting, can be contacted on mobile: +44 378 352 989 from 11.00 HRS GMT; Jan Shaw, interviewed refugees in Macedonia between late March and early June: +44 410 298 795; Balkan field Press Officer, Brendan Paddy, on mobile phone: +44 831 640 150 (a landline may be available for broadcast interviews).**

**** For a copy of the 10-page report, *Humanitarian Evacuation and the International Response to Refugees from Kosovo*, or for a copy of the 8-minute Video News Release, *Human rights must be guaranteed*, please call Amnesty International's press office in London: +44 171 413 5566.**

