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## **Ukraine must release Somali asylum-seekers**

Amnesty International is calling on the Ukrainian authorities to release Somali nationals who are currently on hunger strike in protest at being detained for up to a year “for the purposes of deportation” following court orders issued in December last year.

Approximately 60 Somali nationals – including possibly as many as 20 children – have joined the hunger strike in Zhuravichi Migrant Accommodation Centre in Western Ukraine, where they are currently being detained.

They were rounded up by police at the end of December 2011 and detained for being illegally present in Ukraine.

“Somali nationals in Ukraine have been driven to despair by a vicious cycle of detention and harassment by the police, as well as by an asylum system that fails to protect them,” said Heather McGill, Amnesty International’s expert on Ukraine.

“Everyone knows – the police, the ministry of internal affairs and the Somalis themselves – that they won’t ever be deported. What they need – and are entitled to – is protection, not repeated punishment for fleeing famine and war.”

“Many flee across the border to the EU, only to be returned to Ukraine. Many have been detained repeatedly “for the purposes of deportation” at the Zhuravichi Migrant Accommodation Centre.”

In a letter to Ukraine’s Minister of Interior, Amnesty International called on the Ukrainian authorities to live up to their obligations by ensuring that Somalis have access to a fair asylum procedure and to complementary protection if they cannot be recognized as refugees.

Sultan Haib, one of the Somali nationals being held in Zhuravichi, told Amnesty International that detention for the purposes of deportation is pointless:

“Nobody is going to return and nobody is going to deport you. After 12 months you are let out. We are not criminals. Why is the government doing this to us?”

“Those currently detained include children. Children should only be detained as a last resort and unaccompanied child asylum-seekers are particularly vulnerable and should be offered additional protection,” said Heather McGill.

“There can be no question of returning Somalis indiscriminately to Somalia where the ongoing armed conflict will endanger their lives. Ukraine has an international obligation not to send anybody to a country where they would be at risk of serious human rights violations.”

“The Ukrainian authorities must immediately release all those they have no practical prospect or principled justification for deporting and ensure that they have access to asylum procedures.”