

## UNHCR deploras refugee expulsion by Turkey which resulted in four deaths



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GENEVA – Four men, including an Iranian refugee, drowned after a group of 18 people were forced to cross a fast-flowing river by the Turkish police at Turkey's south-eastern border with Iraq, witnesses have told the UN refugee agency.

The incident took place on Wednesday 23 April at an unpatrolled stretch of the border, near the Habur (Silopi) official border crossing in Sirnak province in south-eastern Turkey. According to eyewitnesses, the Turkish authorities had earlier attempted to forcibly deport 60 people of various nationalities to Iraq through the official border crossing. The Iraqi border authorities allowed 42 Iraqis to enter the country, but refused to admit 18 Iranian and Syrian nationals. The Turkish police then took the 18, which included five Iranian refugees recognised by UNHCR, to a place where a river separates the two countries, and forced them to swim across.

According to the witnesses interviewed by UNHCR, four persons, including a refugee from Iran, were swept away by the strong river current and drowned. Their bodies could not be recovered.

UNHCR is in contact with the surviving refugees through its office in Erbil, in northern Iraq. They are deeply traumatized by the experience, UNHCR staff reported.

UNHCR had sent previous communications to the Turkish government requesting that the five Iranian refugees, who had all been detained after attempting to cross into Greece in an irregular manner, not be deported. Despite UNHCR's requests, the refugees were put in a bus, together with other persons to be deported, and taken on a 23-hour trip to the Iraqi border last Tuesday. UNHCR had expressed in a number of communications sent to the Government of Turkey that it did not consider Iraq a safe country of asylum for these refugees.

UNHCR is seeking clarification from the Government of Turkey on the circumstances surrounding the forced expulsion of the refugees and the tragic loss of life.