



# Iranian Refugees At Risk

## Iranian Refugees' Alliance Quarterly Newsletter

Vol. 3 Spring/Summer 1996

### Update on the Iranian Sit-in Protest in Turkey

On June 28 1996, around midnight, Turkish foreigners police attempted to round up more than 80 Iranian asylum seekers who were still participating in a protest sit-in in Ankara staged in August of 1995. At the time, ten adults were on the 25th day of a protest hunger strike at the office of the Human Rights Association and the rest of the participants, including more than 30 children, were residing at one of the offices of the Freedom and Solidarity Party, the main site of the sit-in.

As a result of the attack by the Turkish police, the site of the sit-in was emptied and as reported by the steering committee of the sit-in, 41 of the sit-in participants were detained and returned to their towns of prior residence. Local authorities have issued the returned asylum seekers three month extensions of stay in Turkey. The rest of the people live in hiding and are afraid to approach the authorities because they fear deportation. A week before the Turkish po-

lice attacked the site of the sit-in, 6 participants while grocery shopping for the group at a nearby store, were arrested and returned to their former towns of residence. All but one participant, Karim Shahrashoub, escaped and returned to the site of the sit-in in Ankara. Shahrashub received a deportation notice immediately after reaching his town of prior residence and was subsequently taken to the border town of Agri and deported to Iran.

In the past 11 months despite continuous threats to disperse and deport the sit-in participants, Turkish authorities have refrained from any actions against the group. During this time, those participants who were arrested outside the site of the sit-in were released shortly after. So has been the case in two occasions where the entire sit-in group was arrested, after staging demonstrations against the Iranian government. However, the deportation of Karim Shahrashub, the first sit-in



Children at the sight of the sit-in

participant deported by the Turkish authorities, is an alarm that the return of the rest of the sit-in participants to their towns of prior resi-

dence and the extension of their stay permits for 3 months, may be a precursor to their eventual deportation.

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### Sit-in background

The sit-in was staged in early August 1995 by more than 160 people (representing close to 70 families) under extremely desperate conditions. In late summer of 1995, dozens of at-risk Iranian asylum seekers whose refugee claims had been rejected earlier by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Branch Office in Turkey, were facing imminent deportation by the Turkish authorities. The sit-in became the only sanctuary against deportation for at-risk people who sought to cancel the deportation orders and urge the UNHCR to re-open the cases of the participants.

This protest action has been widely publicized and received continuous support from groups and individuals in Turkey and all over the world. Just prior to the round up, Turkish groups launched an extensive campaign to urge the UNHCR to assist the sit-in participants resettle in a third country.

International organizations such as the Canadian Council for refugees, Jesuit Refugee Service, and US Committee for Refugees (USCR) have appealed to both the Turkish government and UNHCR to seek a humanitarian resolution of the sit-in.

While the pressure by the sit-in participants and supporting groups convinced the Turkish authorities to reprieve the deportation orders in practice, until the recent round up both the Ankara Branch of the UNHCR and the Geneva Headquarters refused any form of assistance to the sit-in participants.

International standards require, at minimum, safeguards

such as the right for the refugee applicant to be informed of the grounds for the rejection, to receive legal advice and representation, and to have a full and fair hearing in order to produce truly fair decisions.

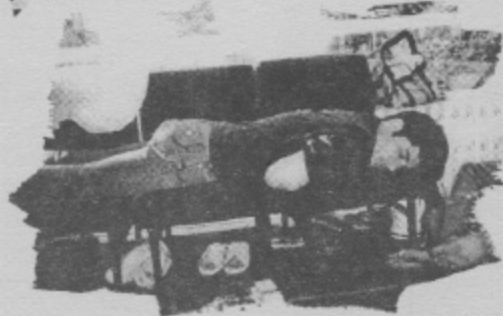
As far as the sit-in refugee claims have been concerned, UNHCR has never met the legitimate burden—bearing on any refugee adjudicating body—of showing that the determination procedure it had used previously for assessing the claims of the sit-in protesters has conformed to these standards. In fact, the refugee determination procedure used by the UNHCR Ankara Branch has been seriously criticized in the past. In a May 1995 report titled "Evading Scrutiny: Does UNHCR Determination System Measure up to International Standards?", Iranian Refugees Alliance has enumerated serious deficiencies in the UNHCR determination procedure. These deficiencies increase the risk of error in the initial determination of the refugee claims of the sit-in participants as well as the review decisions for those who have had appeals.

Despite compelling evidence regarding hostile views and reactions of the Iranian regime toward the sit-in, UNHCR has also refused to re-assess the claims of the sit-in participants based on their new condition. In Iran, people who oppose or are suspected of opposing the government risk serious human rights violations including torture and the death penalty.

In one publicized commentary broadcasted by the Islamic Republic News Agency in February 1996, the Iranian deputy foreign minister for Asia-Pacific affairs, referred to the sit-in



**During the sit-in about 100 adults and 60 children lived in an over-crowded room of an office.**



participants as "a group of hypocrite grouplets". This Iranian official strongly protested "the unacceptable activities and anti-Islamic measures" taken by the sit-in group in Turkey, referring to a demonstration staged against the Islamic Republic of Iran on the 17th anniversary of the victory of the Islamic revolution. In April 1995, Saeed Rejaie, an Assembly representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran, in response to questions asked by a Turkish reporter referred to the sit-in participants as "subversive traitors".

During the past 11 months UNHCR has not considered any other humanitarian solutions for the sit-in group.

### The General Climate

The general climate concerning protection of persons seeking asylum in Turkey has been a deteriorating one. Since November 1994, after Turkish authorities announced new regulation for non-Europeans requesting temporary asylum,

the protection of all non-European asylum seekers has been severely undermined. During 1995, UNHCR reported that 62 Iranians, recognized by UNHCR as refugees or persons of concern, were subjected to forcible return to Iran by the Turkish authorities. Some of the deportees were accepted by a third country for resettlement. Based on reports received by Iranian Refugees' Alliance in Turkey, the actual number of deportees, including those who have not been recognized by the UNHCR, was several times more than the above figure.

Although diplomatic relations between Turkey and Iran have deteriorated in the past several months, the number of deportations has increased. Recently, Amnesty International has expressed fears that Turkey may be expelling Iranian asylum-seekers and refugees to improve relations under a security agreement with Iran, which reportedly includes the

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reciprocal exchange of opposition activists. In April 1995, Evrensil, a Turkish newspaper reported that the reciprocal exchange of the P.K.K. members residing in Iran and the Iranian dissident asylum seekers residing in Turkey was officially confirmed by an Iranian authority.

In early July 1996, Turkey's Islamist-led government of Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan (Welfare Party) won a vote of confidence in Parliament. Many fear that in its zeal to improve relations with Iran's Islamic government, Turkey would vigorously pursue previous agreements on reciprocal exchange of political dissidents seeking asylum in both countries.

### **Support and Viable Solutions for the Group**

The sit-in has relied for the past 11 months on the material help of supporting groups inside and outside of Turkey. More than half of Iranian Refugees' Alliance's program expenses (grants to improve living conditions of Iranian refugees in Turkey, advocacy on their behalf and facilitating durable solutions) for Turkey has been allocated for the sit-in participants. Most sit-in participants are economically disadvantaged and therefore continue to need humanitarian assistance while seeking resettlement in a third country. They also urgently need resettlement assistance.

In light of UNHCR's adamant refusal to reconsider the refugee claims of the sit-in participants, since November 1995 Iranian Refugees' Alliance has assisted several sit-in participants to take advantage of other viable resettlement programs.

### **NATIONS UNIES HAUT COMMISSARIAT POUR LES REFUGIES**

*Délégation en Turquie*

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### **UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES**

*Branch Office in Turkey*

17 Akadın Dava Sokak  
Cankaya - Ankara

### **SIT-IN OF IRANIAN ASYLUM-SEEKERS ENDS Solutions for the group depend upon NGO efforts**

At the end of June, Turkish authorities ended the sit-in of rejected Iranian asylum-seekers which began in August 1995. The foreigners police removed some 70 remaining protesters and took them to the cities where they had been previously assigned to live while awaiting the outcome of their asylum requests. They were then given three-month residence permits with effect from 2 July in order to pursue their applications for entry to other countries or to otherwise leave Turkey. (Another 10 or 12 persons on hunger strike in different premises reportedly went on their own to their assigned cities when they learnt residence permits were being extended.) Turkish authorities may eventually grant extensions of an additional three months if sufficient progress is being made toward a solution.

UNHCR deplores the public demonstrations which have been used by the members of this sit-in group to try to gain recognition as refugees in Turkey after such status was not granted to them on the basis of their previous circumstances in Iran. Such tactics complicate the task of protecting refugees who need temporary asylum in Turkey. UNHCR will not submit the cases of sit-in group members to resettlement countries. However, in the absence of specific guarantees of safe return from the Government of Iran UNHCR has considered them to fall under a special humanitarian status and has obtained the agreement of the Government of Turkey to exceptionally extend their residence permits.

The organizations which have advised and encouraged these rejected asylum-seekers from the beginning of their sit-in now bear a special responsibility to help them find a solution through consular channels or immigration or humanitarian programmes. The efforts which until now have been directed at influencing UNHCR's eligibility decisions should be invested in securing these other solutions for the group members. Meanwhile it is important that the individuals and families concerned should be advised to respect the requirements of the residence permits which have been given to them by the Government of Turkey.

UNHCR Branch Office Ankara  
8 July, 1996

One of these programs is Australia's Refugee & Special Humanitarian Program. All sit-in applicants have applied to this program, but several of them do not have eligible sponsors in Australia—an important element for admission. Iranian Refugees' Alliance has worked to find stronger connections for these sponsorships, and assist admitted applicants financially for medical examinations and plane fares.

A second solution is the Pri-

Private Sponsorship of Refugees in Canada. This is a program that enables eligible individuals and organizations to request that an overseas Visa Officer interview a named refugee for resettling in Canada. Applicants are required to meet both refugee criteria and admissibility criteria which has to do with the ability to successfully establish oneself in Canada. If a refugee's claim is accepted, the sponsor should provide basic emotional and fi-

nancial support for up to a year to enable the refugee to adjust and settle in Canada. Iranian Refugees' Alliance has been trying to form partnerships with eligible sponsors in Canada which has so far resulted in sponsorships for 16 families. We are working to provide sponsorships for more sit-in families within the next three months. (see page 4).

### **UNHCR's Role**

Until the recent round up of  
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## Creative Partnership for a Life-saving Opportunity

### The Private Sponsorship of Refugees in Canada

Unlike the US, private groups and organizations in Canada can directly sponsor a refugee residing overseas to resettle in Canada. (please see box) For many asylum seekers sponsorship in Canada means living a life of dignity, without fear of persecution, and for some, it can even mean the opportunity for life itself.

Since fall 1995, Iranian Refugees' Alliance has actively sought a viable way to provide this opportunity for Iranian asylum seekers in Turkey whose cases have been closed by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and are at imminent risk of deportation.

Consultation with several church groups holding Master Agreements for sponsorship (see box) has revealed that finding sponsors is indeed very difficult.

Due to resource constraints, sponsoring organizations are already overwhelmed by the vast number of urgent demands for sponsorships and are limited in the number of refugees they can sponsor. Nevertheless, experience has shown that the support from refugees' ethnic or national community have facilitated sponsorships to a great extent. As part of its mission to assist at-risk Iranian refugees, Iranian Refugees' Alliance is glad to be the first Iranian group making itself liable for sharing the financial and social obligations for sponsorships.

Fortunately, our commitment for partnership have so far resulted in sponsorship of 16 at-risk Iranian families in Turkey by the Anglican Church of Canada. We hope that by meeting the following objectives, we will meet our commitment for these 16 families and be able to find sponsors for more at-risk refugees in Turkey during the following three months:

- **Practical Obligations:**  
**Assisting new comers in finding accommodation and household needs, seeking long-term employment, registering in English classes, enrolling children in school and adults in occupational training courses when required, and introducing the newcomers to local services.**
- **Financial Guarantees:**  
**Raising a minimum of \$50,000 (US) to ensure meeting our obligations.**

In order to meet these obligations, Iranian Refugees' Alliance needs your continuous support. We invite everyone, especially the Iranian communities in the US and Canada to get on board with us. Your assistance in practical areas and/or your financial contributions guarantees that the above needs are provided, and can make a profound difference in a refugee's life.

Detailed information about our partnership and ways you can help are available. ●

#### Some Facts about

##### Private Sponsorship of Refugees in Canada

- Private sponsorship of a refugee in Canada is a one year commitment whereby a group (citizens or permanent residents) agree to provide the support necessary to enable a refugee to adjust and resettle in Canada. Direct sponsorship entitles the sponsoring group to have an overseas Visa Officer interview a named refugee to determine whether or not s/he meets Canada's requirements for resettlement.
- There are two ways to sponsor refugees:
  - **Group of Five or More** - The group must be composed of at least 5 people whose aggregate income must be at least \$100,000 per year. The members of the group must sign documents stating their annual income, and commit to the financial support of the refugee(s) for one year. The government will investigate the financial strength of the group before approval of the sponsorship.
  - **Sponsorship under a Master Agreement Holder** - Many Canadian churches and organizations have signed agreements with the federal government whereby they agree to stand behind any of their constituent groups wishing to sponsor a refugee family. Therefore the government no longer requires members of individual sponsoring groups to provide financial guarantees. However, the sponsoring group must scrupulously plan to be fully responsible for the emotional, financial, and friendship needs of the sponsored refugee since resources at the level of the parent organization are extremely limited.
- Financial guarantees are required and should be taken very seriously by sponsoring groups. Refugees come to Canada as Permanent Residents and are, therefore, eligible to seek employment and attend language classes. However, during the **one year** period after arrival in Canada, **they are not permitted to receive social assistance from the government.**
- **Sponsorship does not guarantee admission** for resettlement. Refugee applicants must convince the overseas Canadian Visa Officer interviewing them that they meet Canada's refugee **eligibility criteria** (based on Canada's interpretation of the UN Convention definition) as well as immigration **admissibility criteria** (being able to successfully establish in Canada). Persons considered by the Visa Officer to meet the above requirements will be allowed to Canada after having successfully completed a **medical examination**, and provided that a **security check** does not reveal anything to warrant refusal.

*Compiled from information provided by The Working Group on Refugee Resettlement and Inter-Church Committee Committee for Refugees Sponsorship Group.*

## Year End Report-Fiscal 1995

### Programs

Advocacy & Education	\$9,993	14.1%
Humanitarian Aid	\$56,767	80.3%

### Other Expenses

Fundraising	\$2,149	3.0%
Professional & Legal Fees	\$1,178	1.7%
Management.	\$630	0.9%
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	<b>\$71,717</b>	<b>100%</b>

### INCOME

Contributions from the Public	\$63,881	87.1%
Major donors	\$9,500	12.9%
<b>TOTAL INCOME</b>	<b>\$73,381</b>	<b>100%</b>

Fiscal year is from Jan. 20 to Dec. 31.

### Humanitarian Aid Projects

#### Supported this year

- The Fund to Support Iranian Refugees in Turkey:

Total Grants: \$50,050

- The Support Fund for Iranian Refugee Children in Turkey

1995 Norouz Gifts: \$1720

1995/1996 School

Stipend: \$1920

*Special thanks to so many volunteers in the US, Canada and Turkey who contributed more than 4,000 hours of labor to carry on our mission in 1995.*

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the sit-in participants by the Turkish police, UNHCR neither protected the sit-in participants against deportation, nor reconsidered them for resettlement in a third country.

Subsequent to the round up of sit-in participants, Iranian Refugees' Alliance wrote to UNHCR and expressed its concerns regarding eventual deportation of sit-in participants; pointing out that despite its earlier positions UNHCR can still play a constructive role in successful implementation of alternative solutions.

Iranian Refugees' Alliance asked the UNHCR to seek guarantees from the Turkish authorities ensuring that sit-in participants would not be deported to Iran, and to urge the Turkish authorities to grant the sit-in people extension permits for as long as their applications are pending, for a maximum of 3 years.

We also requested that UNHCR consult with the two viable programs on expediting the process, and using fair and generous standards.

In a statement issued on July 8, 1996 (see page 3), UNHCR for the first time considered sit-in participants to fall under a "special humanitarian status." The statement also reports that UNHCR has obtained the agreement of the Government of Turkey to extend their residence permits for a possible 6 months. Although UNHCR still refuses assistance on resettling the sit-in participants Iranian

Refugees' Alliance welcomes the agency's new position of protecting the sit-in participants against deportation as a sign of progress. However, in light of the new alarming political situation in Turkey, Iranian Refugees' Alliance calls on the UNHCR to foresee possible deals between Iran and Turkey for reciprocal exchange of opposition activists. Under such circumstances the only protection for sit-in people would be urgent resettlement in a third country. ●

## Humanitarian Aid Projects for Iranian Refugees in Turkey

If you like to contribute to our humanitarian aid projects in Turkey or would like more information, please fill out and send the form on page 6.




**The Fund for Iranian Refugee Children in Turkey**

*School Stipends*  
1996/97

Our goal is to support 180 Iranian refugee children in Turkey to attend school in 1996/1997.





**THE SUPPORT FUND FOR AT RISK IRANIAN REFUGEES IN TURKEY**

مسئود حیات دله از پناهنگران در خطر ایران در ترکیه

A project of  
Iranian Refugees Alliance, Inc.

## BARRIERS TO PROTECTION: TURKEY'S ASYLUM REGULATIONS

*A Critique of Turkey's Asylum Policies by the US Committee for Refugees*

*Barriers to Protection* is the first comprehensive critique of Turkey's new refugee machination published by a well-known International organization. The author, Bill Frelick, senior policy analyst, interviewed asylum seekers and met with government and UN High Commissioner for Refugees officials in Turkey in October 1995. The report observes extremely hostile and precarious conditions for non-European asylum seekers in Turkey, particularly Iranian and Iraqis, and designates Turkey as a country with an onerous record of deporting asylum seekers to their countries of origin without a fair and comprehensive asylum determination procedure.

Iranian Refugees' Alliance acknowledges US Committee's valuable effort and hopes that *Barriers to Protection* expands International advocacy on behalf of thousands of at-risk asylum seekers in Turkey. ●

To obtain a copy of *Barriers to Protection*, please contact: US Committee for Refugees, 1717 Massachusetts Avenue, NW, Suite 701 - Washington, DC 20036 Tel: (202)347-3507 Fax:(202)347-3418

### Executive Summary

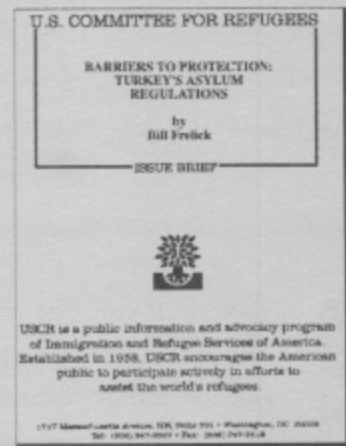
Turkey, whose accession to the 1951 Refugee Convention includes a reservation that excludes non-Europeans from recognition as refugees, promulgated regulations in November 1994 establishing a system for determining whether non-European refugee claimants would even be considered as "asylum seekers" and be given the opportunity to present their claims to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Among other provisions, the new regulations require non-Europeans to file their asylum claims within five days of entering the country, and, for those arriving with improper documents, to file their claims with the police at the location nearest where they entered the country.

In effect, this means that Iranians arriving in major cities such as Ankara or Istanbul after traversing the war zone in southeastern Turkey are required to return to that dangerous area within a very short time period to register their claims with local police officials.

Genuine refugees, persons with a well-founded fear of persecution, particularly Iranians and Iraqis, have been denied official recognition as "asylum seekers" by the Turkish authorities often for having failed to meet arbitrary and restrictive filing requirements unrelated to the merits of their claims. In some cases, Turkey has

forcibly repatriated bona fide refugees to their countries of origin, despite the intervention of UNHCR and other humanitarian organizations, and in violation of the international legal norm of *nonrefoulement*.

In recommendations, beginning on page 16, the U.S. Committee for Refugees calls upon the Turkish government, inter alia, to drop the time and geographical limits on filing asylum claims, to treat non-Europeans the same as Europeans in its refugee law and practice, and to give greater deference to UNHCR with regard to persons for whom UNHCR expresses concern.



## If You Have an Interest in Helping Iranian Refugees PLEASE ACT NOW and JOIN OUR ALLIANCE

Iranian Refugees' Alliance is a US based non-profit organization assisting and advocating on behalf of at-risk Iranian refugees. Because of resource constraints our efforts are currently focused on Turkey where there is a constant flow of Iranians and greater vulnerability. Our efforts are based on volunteer work. Please contact us if you like to participate in our projects or would like more information.

Our projects are entirely funded by contributions. Please make your contributions payable to IRA Inc. IRA is a 501(c)3 tax-exempt organization. All donations are tax-deductible to the extent allowable by

### Here is my contribution of:

\$25     \$50     \$100     \$250     \$ \_\_\_\_\_

If you like to contribute to a specific project or receive more information, please indicate:

- The Fund for Refugee Children (School Stipends)     The Support Fund for Refugees in Turkey (Bi-monthly stipends)
- The Fund for Resettlement (private sponsorship in Canada)     Advocacy & Education (Dissemination of information, urgent action, legal assistance)

I will volunteer

Keep me informed.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Please contact us at:

Address \_\_\_\_\_

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