



# Iranian Refugees At Risk

## Iranian Refugees' Alliance Quarterly Newsletter

Vol. 3 Summer 1995

### Protection of Iranian Asylum Seekers:

#### Developments Since May 1995

On November 30, 1994, the Turkish Government officially declared itself having authority to determine refugee eligibility of non-European asylum seekers. "Temporary stay" permits are granted to only those who are determined to be "genuine refugees". Previously, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was the sole decision maker on refugee claims and Turkish authorities generally permitted asylum seekers to stay in Turkey as long as cases were under consideration. According to the new regulations, UNHCR would consider resettling refugees whose status have been approved by the Turkish authorities and are also determined as worthy cases by the agency. UNHCR would also consult with the Turkish authorities on behalf of cases considered worthy but have been rejected by Turkish authorities.

In May 1995, Iranian Refugees' Alliance issued a report exam-

ining the refugee status determination procedures of both the UNHCR and the Turkish Government. *It concluded that both agencies have failed to satisfy relevant international standards.* The report identified serious shortcomings in the UNHCR refugee determination procedure rendering the procedure unreliable for identifying those who are in need of protection. The report further concluded that the Turkish Government refugee processing system now in effect conflicts with basic requirements for fairness and legitimacy of the refugee status determination procedure.

Iranian Refugees' Alliance called on the UNHCR and the Turkish Government for urgent improvements. To date our organization has not received a response from either the UNHCR or the Turkish Government to the recommendations made in its May 1995 report.

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### Memorandum to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees with respect to the critical situation of Iranian asylum seekers in Turkey whose asylum cases are presently rejected

August 20, 1995

A group of more than 150 Iranian asylum seekers, mostly women and children, whose refugee claims have been rejected by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Branch Office in Turkey have taken refuge in the office of the United Socialist Party (sosyalist birlik partisi) in Ankara. An indefinite sit-in is staged in protest to the UNHCR Office's adjudicating policy. The protest action took place under extremely desperate conditions where dozens of rejected asylum seekers were at once facing imminent threats of forcible return by the Turkish authorities, while UNHCR Branch Office in Turkey continued to refuse a meaningful appeal procedure to rejected claimants.

Although this is the third week of the protest action, the UNHCR Branch Office has not yet responded to the predicament facing the protesters in a **credible and constructive** manner. The inherent secrecy surrounding the practices of the Office, which prevents open scrutiny of the determinations, does not suggest

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### Iranian Refugees' Alliance, Inc.

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However, according to reports, in July 1995 some steps have been taken by both the UNHCR and the Turkish Government to modify aspects of the new refugee processing system. It is reported that an opportunity to submit an appeal request to the Ministry of Interior before deportation of the asylum seeker is introduced to the Government's refugee processing system. It has also been reported that the proportion of asylum seekers recognized by the UNHCR Office as refugees has been significantly higher than it was in previous months.

Iranian Refugees' Alliance welcomes the opportunity for an appeal provided by the Turkish Government. However, it notes that in its present state, the opportunity lacks the necessary minimum requirements for being effective and fair. Neither the pamphlet asylum seekers receive on arrival nor the "proclamation and acknowledgment document" issued to those whose cases are rejected, notifies asylum seekers that they can appeal. In practice, appeals have only included a written request by the asylum seeker to the Interior Ministry for a review, absent the right to representation, to be informed of the basis of the initial rejection and to be heard by the review authorities. Furthermore, insofar as other minimum safeguards--i.e., legal counseling, fair and adequate hearings, impartial and identified decision makers, etc.--are concerned, Iranian Refugees' Alliance maintains its concern that the Turkish Government's refugee determination procedure is generally unfair.

While Iranian Refugees' Alliance acclaims UNHCR's recent activities to protect more refugees, the organization is still concerned because those fairness safeguards which have been lacking in the agency's determination procedure necessary to ensure correct and just decisions are not so far addressed by the Office. As such, the procedure is still not reliable to identify all those who are in need of protection. As far as previously rejected cases are concerned, the fairness and accuracy of such decisions are still open to question.

Iranian Refugees' Alliance emphasizes stringent application of procedural safeguards in the determination process of the UNHCR because it's outcome is the cornerstone of the Office's protection function. Only those who are recognized as refugees are protected by the Office against deportation and are assisted for resettlement. As explicitly agreed with the Turkish authorities rejected asylum seekers are forcibly returned to their country of origin. These returns take place without the rejected asylum seeker having had access to an opportunity to effectively appeal the negative decision or the deportation order to either the UNHCR or the Turkish courts.

In the summer of 1995, dozens of deportation orders were issued by the Turkish Government to asylum seekers whose cases have been closed by the UNHCR. Facing imminent deportation, a sit-in was staged in August 1995 by more than 150 such asylum seekers in the office of the Turkish United Socialist Party.

## NGO Expresses Concern about Iranian Asylum Seekers:

Jesuit Refugee Service is an international church based non-governmental organization advocating on behalf of refugees and displaced persons. The organization has projects in more than 40 countries. Recently, Jesuit Refugee Service-Canada has written letters of concern regarding the situation of Iranian asylum seekers in Turkey to the UNHCR, Turkey's Prime Minister and Canada's Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Citizenship and Immigration.

Parts of JRS-Canada's letter to Prime Minister Tansu Ciller, dated August 2, 1995, reads:

"We share the concerns of the Iranian Refugees' Alliance in New York as well as the Iranian Community Association of Ontario about the situation of Iranian asylum seekers in your country. We are sure that the as a neighboring country you are well aware of the fact that Iran remains a country with very serious human rights problems. The existing government if far from democratic and should not be assessed in its mere expression of good faith. It is the same government that consecrated Khomeini's verdict for the

assassination of the British writer Salman Rushdie. The present regime continues its deification of the late Ayatollah Khomeini who is responsible for thousands of deaths and hundreds of imprisonments.

We cannot deny that executions have apparently decreased since the death of Ayatollah Khomeini. This, However, is because Khomeini successfully completed his policy of total annihilation just before his death.

In its resolution of March 1994, the U.N. Commission on Human Rights expressed "deep concerns at the high number of executions, punishments" in Iran. In August 1994, the U.N. Sub-Committee on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities denounced the widespread violation of human rights by the Iranian Government including "arbitrary and summary executions, arbitrary arrests and imprisonment, unexpected disappearances, the absence of guarantees essential for the protection of the rights to a fair trial." In its World Report of 1995, the Human Rights Watch stated that the "the

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In view of the UNHCR Office's continued in-action to the critical situation of the concerned asylum seekers, Iranian Refugees' Alliance issued a Memorandum (see page 1) to the UNHCR. It reiterated the request for the agency's comments on its May 1995 report on the determination procedure and raised issues related to criteria against which refugee claims are being assessed and issues concerning human

rights laws. In response to the Memorandum, the Branch Office sent an Information Notice (see page 6), further confirming concerns expressed in the Memorandum. At this time Iranian Refugees' Alliance is hopeful to commence consultation with the UNHCR Headquarters with the aim that the Headquarters' involvement will result in a constructive and just resolution.

August 25, 1995 ■



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any particular adherence by the Office to the duty of accountability owed to refugee claimants. Repeated reports from asylum seekers and Turkish organizations suggest that the Office may have opted for a quick disposition of the crisis by merely calling the aggrieved asylum seekers "economic migrants".

Iranian Refugees' Alliance believes that a body involved in a judicial process, pursuant to which people might be erroneously returned to life-threatening situations,

**"a body involved in a judicial process, pursuant to which people might be erroneously returned to life-threatening situations, must justify its determinations under the laws, instruments and norms governing the situation."**

must justify its determinations under the laws, instruments and norms governing the situation. The fact that UNHCR is an international adjudicating body does not lessen this duty. More so, the agency itself has promoted the highest available standards in this regard. According to UNHCR's own principles, asylum seekers can not be dismissed as merely economic migrants a) without due consideration of their claims in **fair procedures** b) without assessing whether or not they are in need of international protection **on grounds other than** the narrow interpretation laid down in the 1951 Convention and c) without the asylum-seeker **having exhausted all possibilities** to be recognized as a refugee.<sup>1</sup>

Nonetheless, to date, there has been no public assurance from the UNHCR regarding the full implementation of the above cited preconditions. Our concerns from this lack of accountability are compounded by strong evidence that the Branch Office has imported restrictive measures and adopted narrow interpretations in implementing its refugee status determination.

The following are urgent issues that, in our view, need be accounted for by the UNHCR in response to the present crisis:

**1) Fairness, fundamental justice, or due process** are legal requirements in many countries which set out minimum safeguards a refugee system must meet in order to be considered generally fair. When these safeguards are removed, then the possibility for errors in determinations increases. In May 1995, Iranian Refugees' Alliance produced a report entitled "Evading Scrutiny: Does UNHCR Refugee Determination Procedure Measure up to International Standards?", which concluded that the UNHCR Branch Office in Turkey has imposed procedural constraints in the determination system that are incompatible with the duty of fairness owed refugee claimants. This conviction derived from clear evidence that certain minimum safeguards were altogether absent and from evidence indicating systematic undermining of a non-adversarial mode for interviews and a perceived lack of impartiality necessary to ensure fair decisions.

Noting the potential for errors in the determination procedure due to lack of several essential safeguards, the report made 16 recommendations to ensure fairness in the determinations. These

included individual legal counseling and representation, access to records and information pertaining to the asylum claim by the asylum seeker or an authorized third party, providing findings and reasoning behind a rejection, expansion of the right of appeal to errors in fact and procedures and not merely to new information and evidence, providing competent and impartial interpreters, and non-adversarial interviews.

As a matter of urgency, Iranian Refugees' Alliance also called upon the UNHCR to reopen cases previously closed and to re-determine these cases under internationally accepted minimum fairness safeguards, so that no person

in need of international protection is returned to Iran in error.

To date, the organization has not received any comments on its stated concerns or on the recommendations made. In the absence of a reply, Iranian Refugees' Alliance maintains that the present UNHCR refugee status determination can not be relied on to identify all refugees and persists in its earlier recommendations. The organization draws attention to the fact that these recommendations can be readily incorporated in the Branch Office's procedures because they are compatible with UNHCR's own guidelines on fair and effective refugee status determination and are explicitly listed by the UNHCR as applicable "to UNHCR procedures", in order to ensure "fair and proper examination of applications".<sup>2</sup>

**As a measure presently essential to implement duties owed to refugees, Iranian Refugees' Alliance calls upon the UNHCR again to immediately reopen cases previously closed before any asylum seeker is forcibly returned and therefore denied her/his right to a fair and just refugee status determination.**

**2) Of prime importance in accurate refugee eligibility determination is application of criteria.** According to the 1951 UN Convention, individuals qualify as refugees if they are unwilling to return to their country of nationality or habitual residence "owing to a

well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion."<sup>3</sup> However, there is no universal

**"There is no factual knowledge whatsoever as to the Office's concept of persecution, the foundedness of information on country conditions used for assessing claims, as well as the guidelines used to apply the definitions."**

definition of persecution and there are different interpretations on restriction applicable to each ground. In countries where information on the basis of a decision have been available, an instructive body of case law has led to more knowledge about criteria. In these countries, refugee claimants, representatives, non-governmental organizations, scholars and UNHCR's national representatives can participate in a meaningful way to ensure that the criteria are applied generously and properly. Many negative decisions are reversed based on misapplication of criteria.

This, however, is not the case in the refugee determination ➤

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procedure of the UNHCR Branch Office in Turkey. Persistent lack of information in the determination procedure has prevented open scrutiny of the criteria being applied on refugee claims. There is no factual knowledge whatsoever as to the Office's concept of persecution, the foundedness of information on country conditions used for assessing claims, as well as the guidelines used to apply the definitions.

Iranian Refugees' Alliance is aware of many

individual cases suggesting that claimants may have been rejected based on a combination of improper or inadequate criteria, misconceptions and lack of information or misinformation about country conditions. There have also been cases which have come to the attention of Amnesty International where the International organization has believed the person would risk serious human rights violations if returned to her/his country.<sup>iv</sup> While the level of inquiries in the determination procedure suggests that the breadth and depth of persecution in Iran is not adequately appreciated, the background of many of the presently rejected claimants raises similar concerns. Amongst the rejected claimants are former political prisoners, close relatives of executed political activists, women who have transgressed Islamic laws and children whose rights under the UN Convention on Children have been systematically violated.

**As a measure to ensure proper use of refugee criteria in assessing claims, Iranian Refugees' Alliance strongly recommends to the UNHCR Office that the criteria used to assess claims by the Office become open for scrutiny to asylum seekers, representatives, and non-governmental organizations involved in refugee and human rights issues. Furthermore, the agency should elaborate, in consultation with non governmental organizations, the most appropriate criteria**

**"non-refoulement (principle of non-return) should be extended to those Iranians, who, although not Convention refugees, may be subjected to violations of fundamental human rights upon return."**

**congruent with the conditions prevailing in Iran. In particular, the Office should provide reasons for rejections, which should go beyond stock phrases such as "not eligible for refugee criteria" and should relate refugee criteria to the claim, explain substantial points raised, and relate the facts to the conclusions.**

3) It is a well-acknowledge fact that levels of persecution in Iran remain high and that violations of fundamental human rights are widespread throughout. The Iranian government is not just known as a regime which is unable to ensure economic, social and cultural rights of

the Iranian population but also as an intolerant and repressive state whose official laws are inherently persecutory and strike at the heart of fundamental civil and political rights. These attributes are further compounded when this regime promotes human rights violations on an international level. Latest acknowledgments of these daily realities in Iran are reported by several international organizations and bodies, including Amnesty International (May 1995), Human Rights Watch (1995), the US State Department (February 1995), and the European Parliament (April 10 1995).<sup>v</sup>

Due to the fact that Iranian asylum seekers flee a country that is known to have a consistently poor human rights record and is known to produce refugees, there is a human rights obligation that has to be met before returning an asylum seeker to Iran. In this context, non-refoulement (principle of non-return) should be extended to those Iranians, who, although not Convention refugees, may be subjected to violations of fundamental human rights upon return. This obligation rooted in human rights law shifts the burden of proof to the returning authority that the person returned would not face a substantial risk of being subjected to violations of fundamental human rights. In realization of this obligation, States in Europe, North America and Australia have widely granted humanitarian or other status to Iranians who may not satisfy the narrow interpretation of the refugee definition in

the 1951 UN Convention but who, nevertheless, merit protection.

However, this reality is not recognized by the UNHCR Office in Turkey. From information provided by individual asylum seekers, it is apparent that the likelihood and fear of human rights violations upon return to Iran is not a matter examined by the Office as either a basis for Convention criteria or as an alternative justifying protection for those who do not meet the narrow Convention criteria. Neither has the Office expressed a

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**Evading Scrutiny:**  
Does UNHCR's  
Refugee Status Determination Procedure  
Measure up to International Standards?  
(An assessment of the practice of the UNHCR Branch Office in Turkey)

Preliminary Assessment of  
the New Turkish Government and UNHCR  
Refugee Processing System for non-Europeans

May 1995

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justification of the notion that the return of rejected asylum seekers to Iran would not subject them to treatment in violation of generally accepted human rights standards.

More disturbing is the predicament faced by those rejected asylum seekers who, nevertheless, are offered protection by resettling countries (privately sponsored refugee or humanitarian visa applications). UNHCR Office has adopted the role of an adverse party in the resettlement of such persons. Because, in this situation, the Office refuses to offer any form of protection, the asylum seekers are left to their own devices to fight expulsion orders and forcible return by the Turkish authorities. In the past, there have been several such applications that have been fully processed and the applicants scheduled to leave Turkey in a matter of weeks, but because UNHCR has refused to exercise its international protection function, applicants have been forcibly returned to Iran. Presently, there are many such applicants who are already granted or have a good chance of being granted protection by resettling countries but are refused temporary protection by the UNHCR to prevent their forcible return.

**As a measure to provide international protection based on international refugee and human rights laws, Iranian Refugees' Alliance strongly recommends that UNHCR should not be an adverse party to a rejected asylum seeker when that person is granted protection from a third country. On the contrary, there should be cooperation with the admitting**

## NGO Expresses Concern

Continued from page 2

rights situation in Iran showed no improvement in 1994. A picture emerged of new obstacles to the rule of law, a marked worsening of the situation of religious minorities, heightened enforcement of intrusive restrictions on basic freedom of expression, thought, opinion and press, and discrimination against women. The government generally excluded independent human rights monitors" (*Human Rights Watch World Report 1995*, p. 269).

There exists strong evidence that the Iranian government has a direct link with international terrorism and is the main supporter of Hizbollah in Lebanon. It also sponsors extra-judicial executions of opponents living outside of Iran. Canada's own Immigration and Refugee Board profile of Iran characterizes the situation there in the following terms: "The Iranian government has long been accused of dispatching death squads to Turkey, Iraq and Europe to assassinate enemies of the regime. The list of victims of such assassinations continues to grow, and is not limited to any particular party" (IRB, Iran: Political Opposition, August 1993, pp. 14-15). The head of the Iranian intelligence service has frequently confirmed the "role of the Iranian agents in the assassination of opposition members abroad." He has mentioned that "the activities of Iranian opposition movements both inside and outside the country were being closely monitored by intelligence service agents" (*Ibid.*, p. 15).

Given the above facts, we urgently appeal to your respectful government to pay a special at-

tention to the Iranian asylum seekers who have fled tyranny and are living in Turkey waiting for resettlement in a third country. We believe that they should be protected against harassment from the Iranian government and its agents abroad. Consequently, we suggest that it is of utmost importance that your government addresses the following issues:

The case of Iranian refugees who are rounded up from time to time by Turkish police in an attempt to transport them to the border towns for the purpose of deporting them back to Iran. It is our strong conviction that bilateral treaties should not go against the violation of the rights of refugees whose lives will be in danger if they are returned to their countries of origin. Article 33 of the Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees has obligated contracting states not to send asylum seekers to countries where they may face persecution (the principle of non-refoulement). We strongly feel that the policy of extraditing Iranian refugees should be stopped immediately.

We further urge your government to implement minimum fairness safeguards in procedures used to determine refugee eligibility of Iranian asylum seekers. We realize that to establish such a system would prove to be costly and would demand specific expertise which your government may not be able to provide at this time. If this is the case, may we respectfully suggest that you take advantage of the UNHCR branch office in Turkey, which might be better equipped to address this present problem.

Finally we are very concerned about the requirement for an exit visa for government-

assisted and privately-sponsored refugees granted resettlement in a third country. We are aware of specific situations whereby individuals ready to travel from Turkey to Canada faced the obstacle of the exit visa and thus were restrained from traveling to Canada. We request that you please revoke the exit visa requirement for refugees ready to resettle."

The organization also wrote to Mrs. Sadako Ogata, the High Commissioner for Refugees, expressing concern about Iranians whose refugee applications were rejected by the UNHCR Branch office in Turkey and Turkish Government's treatment of asylum seekers. Part of JRS's letter to Mrs. Ogata reads:

"We urge you to reopen these cases and conduct further investigation to determine their true merit. Such an investigation should be able to utilize the feedback and cooperation that human rights organizations in Turkey and elsewhere can provide.

"We further urge you to use UNHCR's moral authority to encourage the Turkish government to establish a just refugee determination system based on the UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees - and more specifically - the principle of non-refoulement. We realize that to establish such a system would prove to be costly and would demand specific expertise which the Turkish government may not have at this time. We believe, however, that the UNHCR branch office in Turkey would be better equipped to address this present shortcoming.

"We request that you use your good offices to convince the Turkish government to revoke the exit visa requirement for refugees ready to resettle."

## Memorandum

**C** country and the UNHCR for safe resettlement of that person. Furthermore, UNHCR should elaborate a set of criteria of its own, which provides that Iranian asylum seekers in need of international protection are protected even if they fall outside of the 1951 Geneva Convention definition. This should, in the least, include adequate protection against forcible return, allowing for full processing of privately sponsored visa applications and exit from Turkey.

Through this memorandum, Iranian Refugees' Alliance expresses hope that the UNHCR Office's practices are instantly improved to the highest standards promoted by the agency itself, in full conformity with the UNHCR guidelines and in compliance with other relevant international obligations.

<sup>i</sup> see "Return and Re-admission of Unsuccessful Asylum Seekers, Joint IOM and UNHCR Views, Geneva, 1994, IOM Policy Paper Series.

<sup>ii</sup> see Determination of Refugee Status - Training Module, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 1989.

<sup>iii</sup> United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, adopted by the Conference of Plenipotentiaries on the Status of Refugees and Stateless Persons (adopted 28 July 1951), art. 1(B).

<sup>iv</sup> see TURKEY Selective protection: Discriminatory treatment of non-European refugees and asylum-seekers, Amnesty International, March 1994, EUR 44/16/94.

<sup>v</sup> Amnesty International, IRAN: Official secrecy hides continuing repression, AI INDEX: MDE 113/02/95, Human Rights Watch World Report 1994, US State Department Human Rights Country Report 1994- Iran, European Parliament Plenary Resolution, Strasbourg, 10/04/1995.■

## Reply From the UNHCR Branch Office in Turkey:

*The following is the reply Iranian Refugees' Alliance received from the UNHCR Branch Office in Turkey in reference to the Memorandum. This information notice, which was issued prior to the Memorandum, disappointingly confirms the Office's quick disposition of the crisis.*

NATIONS UNIES  
HAUT COMMISSARIAT  
POUR LES REFUGIES



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FOR REFUGEES

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### INFORMATION NOTICE TO ANSWER QUERIES CONCERNING SIT-IN OF IRANIAN SYLUM SEEKERS IN ANKARA

A group of Iranian nationals have staged a sit-in in the office of the Turkish Socialist Unity Party in Ankara since last weekend. This group numbered little more than 50 with their families. They have expressed that their aim is to have UNHCR Ankara Branch Office review their claims once again to recognize them as refugees and to protest their impending deportation by the Turkish authorities. The International Federation of Iranian Refugees and Immigrants Councils (IFIRIC) declared that a large number of rejected asylum cases were not reviewed by the UNHCR and this provided the Turkish government with a legal justification for their deportation.

Some clarifications are necessary to fully understand the situation of these asylum seekers.

First, the major portion of the constant flow of Iranian citizens to and from Turkey is not related with asylum. Most of them are tourists, businessmen, students, people visiting relatives, etc. Only a small portion have approached either the Turkish government for temporary asylum or UNHCR asking for solutions. The majority can go back to Iran without facing difficulties and do so regularly.

Second, those who seek asylum in Turkish territory are required to comply with Turkish law and regulations. Since 30 November 1994, there is a new Asylum Regulation which provides principles and guidelines for all asylum seekers, including Iranians. But even before the Regulation, since the beginning of 1994, the Turkish government had been interviewing Iranian asylum seekers to decide if they fulfill refugee criteria before they are given temporary residence in Turkey.

Third, UNHCR also examines cases to determine whether their claims make them qualify for UNHCR protection, assistance and eventually resettlement to a third country.

Fourth, UNHCR will not intervene with the government of Turkey to prevent the deportation of people we do not believe meet the refugee criterias. According to Article 6 of the Asylum Regulation, those asylum seekers who had their applications rejected after the review of the Ministry of Interior are to be deported. This seems to be the case for those

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asylum seekers who have staged a sit-in in the Turkish Socialist Party.

Those asylum seekers who participate in the protest seem to have approached UNHCR quite a long time ago. Each of their cases have been evaluated at least two times by different legal officers as the international standard requires. Most of them had a review three or four times to ensure the correctness of each decision. They were found not to fit the refugee criteria in the various assessments.

Not all asylum seekers whose claims have been reviewed by the government of Turkey or UNHCR turn out to have valid reasons for seeking refugee status. Some Iranians leave their country for economic and other personal reasons.

UNHCR Ankara Office has been very open to keep a permanent dialogue with the Iranian refugee community. UNHCR officers have met at least once a month since the last three or four years with the representatives of IFIRIC to solve the problems of Iranian asylum seekers and refugees.

11 August 1995



## Refugee Voices

Refugee Voices intends to reflect the voices, problems, needs and aspirations of refugees. For this issue, we thank A.M. for his narrative essay. (the names of refugees are omitted as a matter of protection).

In my temporary stay permit it is printed that I am barred from employment, education, and doing business in Turkey. But I finally decided to disregard the fact that these rights are taken away from me. I had to support my wife and kids. That day I left the house to look for a job. My best bet was to go to some one that I knew. Why not the baker? He was a kind man and ever since he knew I was Iranian he has tried to bake me a bigger bread. I had learned to speak Turkish quite well. I went to him and described how desperately I needed a job. He thought for a while and told me that unfortunately they had enough workers at the bakery. I asked him to inquire from his friends. I told him about my job experiences and the fact that I have worked since fifth grade, I knew welding, construction, plumbing and I could also do a contractors job. I have a high school diploma and also have studied in a professional school. I could easily understand architectural layouts and could also implement layouts. He said he doubted he could find anything in these areas but that he would do his best to find me something. I called on him three days in a row. On the fourth day he informed me that a friend of his who owns a quarry was willing to offer me a job. I rushed home to give the good news to my wife and children.

The next day I left the house at 6:30 a.m. My wife saw me off with anxious eyes, worrying for my health and the risk of being caught and perhaps facing deportation. We had to take our chances. My baker friend took me to a cafe and introduced me to my boss. In a short while the cafe was full of workers. Most of them stared at me and expressed whether I was strong enough for the job. Finally the bus arrived, a small cargo bus that the driver had converted himself by covering it up and installing a door, two glass windows and some metal seats. Looking at the size of the bus and the number of workers I was sure that we were going to the work place at least in two or three trips. All of a sudden, everyone ran towards the bus, pushing each other to get in. The boss asked me why I was not getting in. I told him that there was no room left. He said that I should hurry up and find room, otherwise I would be left behind. I got in the packed bus. For an instant I recalled the vehicles that used to transport political prisoners in Iran and I felt like a prisoner again.

After half an hour the bus stopped and the crowd rushed out. I got the sight of the quarry and in front of me was the scene from the film Spartacus, the period of slavery. There were big holes cut out from the mountains which were covered by dark clouds. We walked towards the job site and precisely at 8:00 a.m. we started to work.

With a roar the electric saw and the delivery machines were turned on. Someone screamed at us to hurry up and lift the railings that were lying on the ground. There were four of us and in teams of two we were supposed to lift a metal rail that was 6 meters long and 1 meter wide. I mustered all my power and to the count of three my partner and I lifted a rail. It was impossi-

ble to straighten my back. I could hear my wife asking me to promise that I take care of myself and I wondered if I can keep my promise.

After we finished moving the rails, four of us, including me, were assigned to the electric saw. One of the workers turned the two motor-six cylinder machine on and started cutting the slates. He was cutting the slates into 18x30x80 cubic centimeters and the rest of us had to lift and carry them. Each piece weighed about 60 Kilograms. We had to carry them away quickly so that the machine could cut faster. Each of us carried 20 stones in each round while the machine was throwing pieces of the cut stone at us. We didn't have safety helmets. We were so sweaty and covered with dust and dirt that we couldn't tell who we were anymore. I wished it would rain so that we could rest a bit. I could tell that others were looking forward to a rain too by the way they were looking at the sky. Time went by slowly. I was wishing that it was lunch time and we could take a rest for lunch that it started to rain slowly. But I was wrong, work did not come to a halt. In fact it became much more difficult. The stones were slippery and harder to carry. I dropped them on my toes several times. The pain was excruciating and blood was spurting out from under my nails. I could not wipe the mud on my face because I was covered all over. My eyes were red and itchy.

Lunch break was finally announced at 12:30. I sighed with relief. We had an hour for lunch, more than half of it spent in walking back and forth to the kitchen. On my way I started a conversation with one of the Turkish workers and asked him about the pay. He said that before a recent strike they were paid 250,000 TL per day, but thereafter the pay has been 300,000 TL per day. After walking for two kilometers and waiting for another 10 minutes in line I finally got my lunch, one pepper 'dolma' in soup and half an 'akmak' bread. I sat down and noticed the workers who ate their food hurriedly so that they get back to work on time. There was not even time to wash off the mud from their hands and faces. The site of such hardship killed my appetite. I reluctantly ate the small portion of food so that I have some energy for the rest of the day. On our way back to work I asked one of my co-workers when the daily job ended. He said that at 5:30 we will get our pay coupons and by 6:30 we will be back in town. To my right there was a site where three men were loading the trucks. Two of them would lift a big slate and put it on the third man's back. The man would swiftly transfer them to the truck. I wondered how he could lift such a weight without getting arthritis or a slipped disc. My co-worker noticed my astonishment and asked what I was staring at. He said we had to do the same thing too. I confessed that it seemed impossible and that I didn't have the strength. He admitted that he did not either, but added that there was no other choice. I was truly scared. Perhaps I will survive today but what about tomorrow?■

## The Support Fund for At-Risk Iranian Refugees in Turkey

**Why The Fund?** Because Turkey does not recognize non-Europeans as refugees, resettlement in a third country is the only option available to Iranian refugees who flee to Turkey in fear of political, social, religious or gender based persecution. The resettlement process can take several years, during which asylum seekers are deprived of basic rights including employment. The United Nation High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) does not provide financial assistance to asylum seekers until it recognizes their status as refugees. For arrivals after July 1994, approval of a separate refugee eligibility application by the Turkish Government is another prerequisite for UNHCR's assistance. Those who finally receive UNHCR stipends, struggle to make ends meet, because the stipends are paltry. **The Support Fund For At-Risk Iranian Refugees in Turkey has been established to meet the basic needs of Iranian asylum seekers who otherwise would not have necessary resources.**

**How it operates:** A single refugee is assisted with **\$30/month** and a family refugee receives **\$50-\$65/month**. By pledging any or all of the above amounts or multiples of them you will make a significant economic and security improvement in each recipient's life. If the above amounts are too costly we ask you to please consider pledging as little as **50 cents a day** (\$15 a month) or sending a one-time **gift contribution**. All contributions make a difference. Support funds will be sent to Turkey every other month (starting Jan.). If you make a long-term pledge, we prefer that your payments be bimonthly. In any case, we will always inform you when pledge payments are due. You will receive confirmation of your support from the recipient refugee(s) which will be forwarded to you by us. You also have the option to communicate with the refugee(s) that you support. Your letters may also be forwarded through us. We will respect anonymity if requested. The Support Fund operates in Turkey with cooperation of individual asylum seekers who work closely with Iranian Refugees' Alliance on a voluntary basis.

**Current needs:** For the first half of 1995, \$20,200 was raised in the Fund which assisted 87 families on a regular basis. Although the stipends have not been sufficient, they have made significant improvements in the recipients' economic and security situation. There are also many more asylum seekers who need assistance but are still not supported due to lack of funds. Currently we have **39 new requests** for financial assistance from asylum seekers in dire conditions. The profiles of some of the families are described below.



■ **Abubakr** fled to Turkey with his spouse and child almost a year ago. His average monthly minimum needs include 4 million TL<sup>✠</sup> for renting a room (including expenses for electricity and water) and 3 million TL for food and clothing and 1.5 TL for expenses such as illnesses, phone calls and commuting. He expresses that : "Since my asylum case has been closed by the UNHCR I am forced to live in hiding and repeatedly change my place. This adds huge expenses since we have to pay real estate agents and provide a deposit every time. On the other hand my wife is pregnant and that also adds to our expenses. Thanks to other refugees who have so far helped us to cover the medical expenses for my wife. In addition I have a fractured ear lobe due to the tortures I have been subjected to and for curing it I have to come with at least 3 to 4 million TLs."

■ **Massed** fled to Turkey with his spouse and two children a year and half ago. His file was recently declared as closed by the UNHCR. His average minimum monthly expenses include 7 million TL for renting a room and 6 million TL for food and clothing. He expresses that : "Unfortunately I have no source of assistance overseas and my only source of income is the nightly job I do with my young son. We work until 3 o'clock in the morning and even this is not sufficient to meet the high expenses of living in Turkey. My innocent children have terrible nutrition and this is while they are in their growth years and they are very intelligent and have always been one of the best students when they used to go to school. My children have not had any schooling during the past two years and instead they have lived in horror and anxiety without having any positive prospect of being freed from this situation. Last year my spouse caught pneumonia from the cold season and lack of means to have enough heat. If it weren't for the help of our neighbors and friends we could never have managed to cure her. I am worried what will happen to us during this years cold season because we need at least three tons of coal for our heating and that is 7 million TLs."

✠ 1 dollar equals to 47,000 to 50,000 TL (Turkish Lira)





■ **Avareh** fled to Turkey more than a year ago. His monthly minimum expenses are 1.7 million TL for renting a room and 3 million TL for food and clothing and some amount for phone calls and commuting to the UNHCR Office. He expresses that : "I am mostly supported by other refugees because my physical condition does not allow me to work. I have heart disease, disc , blood pressure and insomnia. Currently my case is under consideration by the UNHCR and I have not registered an application with the Turkish police. If I am recognized by the UNHCR then things would get better, Otherwise I have to reach another country no matter what. Because my return to Iran is the end of my life."

■ **Shahla** fled to Turkey with one of her children less than a year ago. She is recognized as a refugee by the UNHCR Office, however because her arrival postdates the new Turkish Government's Regulations, she must stay and register with the border town police. She expresses that: "Going to the border towns would lead to my deportation and because I have been politically active in Iran, I have instead lived in hiding. I am not eligible for the financial aid that UNHCR gives to refugees, because I do not have the permit to stay in Turkey. Currently, I have problems with the police of the town I am staying in and I have to escape to another town. I have no source of income and facing the inflation in Turkey I feel that I am breaking apart."

■ **Salvanagh** fled to Turkey with his spouse and youngest child near a year ago. After two stages of interviews with the UNHCR his case is still under consideration and therefore he has not received financial assistance from this agency. He expresses that : "When I fled Iran I had to leave two of my children behind. I do not have any one abroad and I have 7 brothers and sisters in Iran and my parents are in their old ages and also have to take care of my two children, I have no source of income other than to rely on my own labor. So far I have lived by washing dishes in restaurants for half of what they pay to a regular employee, in both the heat of the summer and the freezing cold of the winter and while we have to battle an appalling inflation rate in Turkey ."

Please join in our efforts to assist more refugees and to raise the amount of the stipends. If you are interested in helping, please fill out the following form and send it to us with a gift or if sponsoring a refugee with the first payment of your pledge. Please share this urgent request with other potential allies of at-risk Iranian refugees in Turkey. If you need more information, please contact us immediately. We are looking forward to hearing from you and your friends.

**✓ YES! I Want to Support  
Iranian Refugees in Turkey**

☐ My **monthly** pledge is :

☐ \$15/month (makes a difference)

☐ \$30/month (supports a single refugee)

☐ \$50/month ☐ \$100/month ☐ \$\_\_\_\_/month  
(supports a family refugee)

■ My **payments** are:

Please consider bi-monthly payments

☐ **bi-monthly** ☐ every \_\_\_\_ months

■ Enclosed is my **first** payment \$ \_\_\_\_.  
Inform me of my next payment dates.

☐ **or** here is my gift of \$ \_\_\_\_

☐ I would like to communicate with the recipient refugee.

☐ I would like to remain anonymous.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Please make your donations payable to **IRA Inc.**  
IRA is a 501(c)3 tax-exempt organization. Donations are tax deductible to the extent allowable by law.

Our mailing list is confidential.

IRA Inc. Cooper Station POBox 316 NY, NY 10276-0316

## School Year Stipends for Children *Making schooling possible for children*

The new school year in Turkey starts soon. Although the Turkish Government does not officially allow Iranian refugee children to attend public schools, in some towns the local authorities have not objected. Recently, parents of fourteen children have contacted Iranian Refugees' Alliance to request allocating stipends for school uniforms, books, stationery and money for lunch so that their children can attend. While there is fortunately no charge for public school tuition, the above items are charged and are essential for the children's educational needs.

We are thankful to the parents who informed us of this opportunity and critical need. The number of children in need of such stipends are many times more than the ones who have contacted us. A "Fund to Support Iranian Refugee Children in Turkey" has been set up for special needs of children. We will do our best to allocate stipends and provide educational opportunities for as many children as possible. We will also petition the UNHCR to financially assist the children to attend schools as well as to urge the Turkish Government to allow all refugee children enjoy their internationally recognized right to education.

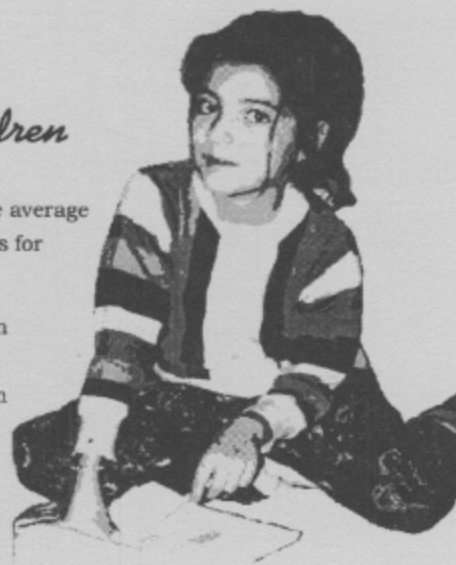
The new school year will start soon, so we are planning ahead by requesting \$60 for each child. We are currently conducting a

survey to estimate the average cost of school supplies for each child.

If you are interested in helping a child attend school while s/he is in Turkey, please take action NOW by sending \$60 to defray the cost of books, stationery, school uniform, and lunches. The recipient child will send you her/his photo and will respond with a photo and story of her/his educational and life experiences while in Turkey.

When our survey is finished we will inform you of the exact costs and you will have the option to of remitting the difference. If the additional amount is not affordable for you, we will find a co-sponsors for that child.

Please refer to the form below and send your contributions as soon as possible. ■



## If you Have an Interest in Helping Iranian Refugees, PLEASE ACT NOW and Join Our Alliance

### Our efforts are based on volunteer work.

Please contact us if you like to participate in IRA's projects or would like more information. New ideas and suggestions are greatly appreciated.

### 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 law.

**We are eager to hear from you soon.**

### Here is my contribution of:

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

If you like to contribute to a specific project please select one:

☐ The Fund for Refugee Children (School Year Stipends)   ☐ The Support Fund for Refugees (please fill out the form on page 9)

☐ Legal Support:   ☐ other:

☐ I will volunteer

☐ Keep me informed.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Tel: \_\_\_\_\_

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