

URGENT ACTION

UNLAWFUL DEPORTATIONS OF SYRIANS MUST STOP

Over the past few months, the Turkish authorities have been deporting Syrian refugees to Syria, in violation of international and domestic law. At the same time, refugees whose Turkish identification documents are no longer valid are unable to renew them, even though Turkish law permits this. Turkey must halt all deportations to Syria and allow refugees to renew their IDs.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

Mr Süleyman Soylu, Minister of Interior
Ministry of the Interior
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Dear Minister,

I am writing to express serious concern about the recent treatment of Syrian refugees in Turkey. I understand that your country is the world's largest host of refugees, at around 4 million people. But this admirable generosity does not absolve your government of its obligation to respect international law.

There have been disturbing reports in recent months that the Turkish authorities have been apprehending and deporting large numbers of Syrian refugees. People currently trapped in Idlib Province in Syria claim they were apprehended in Turkey in July 2019, detained for several days, then deported through the Bab Al Hawa crossing between Turkey and Syria. The people who were deported were sometimes unregistered or outside their province of registration; although others were in their designated province. In any case, international law and Turkey's own laws prohibit sending people to danger in Syria, regardless of their legal status.

For refugees whose Turkish identification documents have expired or been cancelled, it appears virtually impossible to renew them. The reasons for this are unclear, as Turkish law permits people to renew visas. People without ID cards are terrified of being apprehended and deported. They are trapped at home, too afraid to work, attend medical appointments, or buy food.

Reports of increased deportations occurred around the same time as the authorities instructed all unregistered Syrians to leave Istanbul – initially by 20 August but extended until 30 October. Beyond spreading more panic among Syrian refugees, it is feared that this upcoming deadline will be used as a pretext to accelerate deportations.

I urge you to immediately stop unlawful deportations of Syrian refugees, ensure that those whose identification documents have expired or been cancelled are able to renew them and investigate all allegations of forced deportations to grave danger in Syria.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Turkey is the world's largest host of refugees, presently at about 4 million, with most of them (over 3.6 million) coming from Syria. In theory, all Syrians in Turkey are granted "Temporary Protection" status, but they must first register and receive ID documents in order to access essential services, including healthcare and education. The Turkish authorities have spent billions of Euros hosting this population, with some financial support from the European Union (EU).

Despite claims to the contrary by Turkey and the EU, Turkey is not a safe country for refugees and asylum seekers. Amnesty International, and other organisations, have received credible and consistent evidence of deportations to Syria between 2014 and 2018. *Refoulement*, or deporting someone despite a risk of serious human rights violations, is prohibited under both Turkish law and international laws, to which Turkey is a signatory. Syrian refugees usually say that they are forced or tricked into signing a so-called "Voluntary Return Agreement", which is sometimes written only in Turkish.

Upon their expulsion to Syria, their Temporary Protection identification documents are cancelled. Those who manage to re-enter the country – virtually always irregularly, since the border is effectively closed – are left without any legal status and are particularly vulnerable to deportation.

Some people do return to Syria on a truly voluntary basis, for instance to bring back elderly relatives or renew passports. These people have told Amnesty that they were not informed of the consequences of leaving Turkey. After their necessarily irregular re-entry they have found that their Temporary Protection status has been cancelled.

On 7 January 2019, the Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM) issued a circular clarifying that Temporary Protection ID-holders who had lost their status should be able to reinstate it. However, for reasons that are unclear, it appears virtually impossible to renew or reinstate Temporary Protection status once it has been removed, regardless of how the loss occurred – for instance whether the return was forced or truly voluntary, or if the ID documents simply expired.

On 22 July 2019, the Istanbul Governorate declared that all Syrians who were not registered in Istanbul had until [20 August](#) to depart for other provinces. DGMM later extended this deadline until [30 October](#). The July announcement spread panic and occurred around the same time as reports of increased deportations to Syria.

It is feared that similar events will take place in October. Istanbul is host to over 500,000 registered Syrians, as well as many thousands of others who are unregistered or registered in another province. Although no Syrian refugees are fully protected against *refoulement*, those who appear particularly vulnerable are those without ID documents, people outside their province of registration, and people working without permits. By the end of 2018 only about 68,000 such permits had been granted, so the latter category encompasses almost all working Syrian refugees in Turkey.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: English and Turkish

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 8 November 2019

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

ADDITIONAL TARGETS: Turkish Embassy in London, 43 Belgrave Square, London, SW1X 8PA, United Kingdom