
PRESS RELEASE

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Refoulement of Iraqi citizens fleeing to Greece – Common statement by 16 NGOs

We wish to express our profound concern regarding the policy of the Ministry of Public Order towards Iraqi citizens entering into our country. In particular, whereas until recently the readmission protocol between Greece and Turkey was not applied to Iraqis, the Greek authorities instead adopting a policy of tolerance including avoiding detention and deportation/refoulement of Iraqi citizens, lately there have been arrests and returns to Turkey on the basis of the readmission protocol. Turkey provides no guarantees for the protection of the rights of Iraqi citizens. Moreover, as has been noted by UNHCR's latest press release, Turkey often deports them to Iraq.

This policy is being pursued at a time during which widespread violence and mass violations of human rights in Iraq are rapidly escalating. Furthermore, the manner in which it is being implemented violates international refugee law and human rights law. Iraqis coming to Greece to avoid persecution faced in their country on the grounds referred to in the 1951 Geneva Convention are clearly refugees in accordance with the meaning of article 1 of the Convention and are protected against refoulement under article 33 of the same Convention, even if they have not lodged a claim for asylum. Moreover, Iraqi citizens fleeing to Greece are also protected against refoulement on the basis of article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

In light of the foregoing, Iraqi citizens fleeing to Greece, including entire families and unaccompanied minors, are persons in need of international protection and therefore cannot be subject to the procedure of administrative deportation provided by Law 3386/2005. On the contrary, the Greek State must ensure their lawful residence in Greece, taking special care of families and vulnerable groups, such as women, pregnant women, children and the elderly.

We call upon the Ministry of Public Order to address the matter of Iraqi citizens fleeing to our country, in a manner which is guided by legality according to international and national law, with paramount responsibility and care for the respect of human rights.

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