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## **TURKEY: Two Scottish journalists detained for two weeks**

**Two British journalists reporting on 100+ Ahmadi asylum-seekers detained for two weeks and beaten**

*“They put my hands on my back, grabbed me by the neck, and just threw me on the bus, they have taken my phone even though I’m UK press.”*

See interview on <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Px3tLMww0kM&t=1s>

By Hadil El-Khouly for Human Rights Without Frontiers

HRWF (10.06.2023) – These were the words of independent journalist Alexandra Foreman, 34 from Watford, live streamed from a hidden phone on a bus by the Turkish-Bulgarian border. Her voice was visibly shaken from the scene that just took place in front of her: 104 asylum seekers including women, children, and elderly individuals violently beaten with batons, punched, kicked, and shoved on buses by Turkish border police, and then detained. Gunshots were fired in the air, there was blood everywhere.

The 104 asylum seekers who are members of the Ahmadi Religion of Peace and Light, a persecuted religious minority, were at the border exercising their right to legally claim asylum before being assaulted by the Turkish border police. Alexandra was accompanying the group on the border that day documenting the group's attempt to seek asylum, alongside Scottish national and journalist Sermad Al-Khafaji, 43 from Glasgow. Despite being members of the press, they were both assaulted and detained by Turkish authorities alongside the group.

Alexandra and Sermad were kept in detention for two weeks before being released with no charges. They have returned to the UK, giving first-hand accounts of extreme levels of police brutality and abhorrent human rights violations enacted upon them and the group during detention.

In their first interview after their return, they revealed details of physical and psychological abuse they both endured at the hands of the Turkish Gendarmerie officers. Sermad recounts how he was instantly targeted as a member of the press during the events at the border.

He says: *"I was apprehended brutally and isolated first, once the camera was taken away from me I was handcuffed with extreme venom to the point that I still have numbness in my finger and thumb."*

As they were both taken to the gendarmerie police station, Sermad and Alexandra report how during the interrogation false accusations were thrown at them, accusing them of being agent provocateurs. Turkish state media also released [false news reports](#), stating that Sermad and Alexandra were British spies who came to the country for espionage activities. During detention, they also reported how the Turkish gendarmerie officers tried to get them to sign papers in Turkish stating they are affiliated with a terrorist organization.

Even though there were no charges against them, Sermad and Alexandra were held illegally for a whole two weeks, during which they endured physical and psychological trauma.

Sermad explained that one of the reasons they were held so long is to give time for their bruises to recover so as to not give evidence of the violence they were subjected to.

He says: *"They pulled my arms both backward and they pushed my head forward, that caused me spinal damage, they did this deliberately for me to release the camera. They also smacked my head from the back, they beat my head with fists."*

Alexandra and Sermad continue to give harrowing details of violence enacted against the group, where male members of the faith were beaten up in front of their children.

Alexandra says: *"It is evident that the children had been incredibly traumatized by the experience at the border and there was so much violence there and they should not have had to see that."*

One of the many other injustices Sermad and Alexandra report was endured by the group is the preferential treatment they were given as British citizens in comparison to the other members of the group. They explain that while they for example could have access to medical care at their request, children and elderly members in critical condition were struggling to be seen by a doctor or receive medication they needed.

The 104 members of the Ahmadi Religion of Peace and Light remain in detention until today, with deportation orders issued against them. They have all fled extreme forms of persecution in their home countries of Iran, Algeria, Iraq, Azerbaijan, Jordan, Palestine, Thailand, and Turkey. Deporting them is not just a violation of international human rights law on Turkey's behalf, but would expose the group to the risk of torture, cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment, or illegal detention and prosecution, including the risk of the death penalty in the country of origin.

Thanks to Alexandra and Sermad the scenes of violence and illegal pushback against the group on the border were captured on camera and broadcast on satellite TV to the whole world to see. Today they continue to speak about the plight of the detained members, revealing details of the human rights abuses

they suffered, and calling for the international community to raise this as an emergency crisis, to annul deportations, and grant the group asylum in safer lands.

Video about the situation of the 100+ Ahmadi asylum-seekers: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bTE4ADNA2BI&t=56s>

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