

Notice: Undefined index: et_header_layout in /home/hrwfe90/domains/hrwf.eu/public_html/wp-content/plugins/pdf-print/pdf-print.php on line 1214

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TURKEY/EU: Over 100 Ahmadi asylum-seekers beaten at the Turkish border

TURKEY/EU: Over 100 Ahmadi asylum-seekers beaten at the Turkish border with Bulgaria

Here is some footage of the violence at the border:

https://youtu.be/ZkdkB_9HCFY –
<https://youtu.be/g49EqywMiko>
– https://youtu.be/EJEdgpST_Rc –

<https://youtu.be/M70SYmX4Q-k> –
<https://youtu.be/hmxDq06SwFQ>

By Willy Fautré, director of *Human Rights Without Frontiers*

HRWF (25.05.2023) – Over 100 Ahmadis – women, children and elderly people – from seven countries presented themselves at the Turkish-Bulgarian border on 24 May to lodge a claim for asylum with the Bulgarian Border Police but they were denied access to it by the Turkish authorities.

On the Turkish side, they were stopped and faced extreme violence. **Gunshots were fired, they were threatened and their belongings were thrown away.** They were beaten and dragged away by bus to the police station of Edirne, a city situated 7 km from the Greek and 20 km from the Bulgarian borders. This all happened on TV live as the Ahmadis were broadcasting.

This morning, I talked with their spokesperson, a lady from Iran, who said “It is vital for us not to be sent back to our country because we would risk being executed. Getting asylum in the EU will be our passport to life.”

In February 2023, HRWF had published a news about the **ongoing detention of 13 Ahmadis, eight weeks after their arrest in Iran.**

Additionally, an open letter by the European Border Violence Monitoring Network (BVMN) was sent on Tuesday 23 May to the General Directorate of Border Police (Bulgaria), The Executive Director of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) and The Fundamental Rights Officer of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency.

The letter which was endorsed by human rights organizations, including *Human Rights Without Frontiers*, was urging the said authorities to protect the group of Ahmadis and their right to claim asylum at the border in accordance with international

law.

Letter by the European Border Violence Monitoring Network

“We, the undersigned, are writing to urge you to fulfil the fundamental rights obligations Bulgaria are bound by under the Law on Asylum and Refugees, Article 18 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, Directive 2013/32/EU, the 1951 Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and Article 14 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, namely the right to asylum and to a full and fair individualised assessment with the right to appeal for a group of 103 members of the Ahmadi Religion of Peace and Light. We reiterate that all persons should be guaranteed access to EU territory to apply for international protection, regardless of their individual claim.

There is currently a group of 103 members of the faith who have gathered in Turkey after having fled persecution in their home countries – Algeria, Iran, Iraq, Azerbaijan, Jordan, Thailand, and Palestine. Members of the Ahmadi religion have been labelled as ‘heretics’ and ‘infidels’ in many countries due to their beliefs, a trend they report has worsened since the release of their gospel, ‘The Goal of the Wise’, in December 2022. Members of the faith report that a number of the claims written in the book are considered ‘heretical’ in that they are considered contrary to other religious beliefs. These views, the group state, have led to their persecution through accusations of ‘denigrating Islam’. In fact, in Algeria and Iran members have faced arrest and prison sentences for exactly this, being forbidden for exercising their rights to religious freedom, and in Iraq they have suffered gunned attacks on their homes by armed militias, and scholars have called for them to be killed.

For the above reasons, many members of the group decided to flee their home countries and pursue their right to seek protection and freedom to practise their religion. They do not

feel safe to lodge an application for international protection in Turkey due to the consistently documented violations of religious freedoms, including the criminalisation of blasphemy or expressions deemed insulting to religious beliefs. Although Turkey is a secular country, President Erdoğan has close ties to the Muslim Brotherhood and, In fact, a 2022 report from the European Parliament warns that, in Turkey, religious minorities face “sustained legal and administrative pressure”. Furthermore, the criminalisation of blasphemy under Article 216(3) of the Turkish Penal Code shrinks any space for views that are different to the country’s mainly practised Sunni Islam. In fact, Turkish singer Sezen Aksu received massive backlash for lyrics that describe Adam and Eve, considered holy figures in Islam, as ‘ignorant’, with President Erdoğan promising to “rip out the tongues” of those who insult religious figures. This event has been pointed out by the Ahmadi group as one reason for their fear that their beliefs would be persecuted and considered ‘heretical’ in Turkey.

In light of this, the group do not feel safe to lodge their applications for international protection in Turkey as they fear they will be faced with similar persecution to that which they have fled in their own countries. As a result, they have tried to seek legal pathways to Bulgaria and have contacted the UNHCR in Bulgaria, the State Agency for Refugees (SAR), and even the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to request a visa on humanitarian grounds. All these efforts have been unsuccessful. As a result, they are planning to present themselves at the official Kapikule border crossing point between Turkey and Bulgaria next week, to request asylum in front of the Bulgarian Border Police. We, the undersigned, urge that this request be respected, in line with the Art, 58(4) of the Law on Asylum and Refugees (LAR) which states asylum can be applied for with a verbal statement submitted in front of the border police. We further urge the Bulgarian authorities to respect Article 279(5) of the Bulgarian Criminal Code which denotes that border crossing is not a

criminal offence if you are crossing to seek asylum.

The above information has demonstrated that the group have a well-founded fear of religious persecution, and risk their right to freedom of expression, if they are forced to return to their home countries or to remain in Turkey. Therefore we, the undersigned, call for their applications for international protection to be registered/lodged and treated with full, individualised assessments in Bulgaria in line with national law, European Union law and international human rights law.”

Signatories:

Border Violence Monitoring Network

Mobile Info Team

Northern Lights Aid

Collective Aid

Mission Wings Foundation

Centre for Legal Aid, Voices in Bulgaria

Библиофем (BiblioFem)

Association on Refugees and Migrants in Bulgaria

Sea-Watch e.V.

Europe Cares

Hope and Humanity Poland

Project ELPIDA

Mobile Info Team

Africa Working Group IRF Roundtable Washington DC

Bitter Winter Magazine

Human Rights Without Frontiers

Samos Volunteers

Be Aware and Share

Network Anthropia

InterEuropean Humanitarian Aid Association

We Are Here

SolidariTee

Set My People Free (Sweden)

Solidarity With Migrants

Voice For Justice

Legalise Apostasy

United Macedonian Diaspora

Aria Razfar, Professor of Linguistics & Education, University of Illinois Chicago Abdullah

Hashem, The Ahmadi Religion of Peace and Light

Photo: Turkish-Bulgarian border (Credit: Sofia Globe)

[Further reading about FORB in Turkey and EU on HRWF website](#)

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