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Over 100 members of persecuted religious minority held at Turkish border

Members of the Ahmadi Religion of Peace and Light seeking asylum in the European Union have been detained in Turkey since May.

[RNS](#) (13.09.2023) - On May 24, 104 members of a minority religious group arrived at the Turkish-Bulgarian border expecting to find asylum. Instead, they were met with clubs and gunfire.

"They started getting attacked by the Turkish border guards. They started beating them with batons," said Alexandra Foreman, a United Kingdom-based member who was at the scene. "And it was very much like a war zone. There was blood everywhere."

Almost four months later, the asylum-seekers — including more than 20 children — are still being detained in Turkey, hoping to make their way into the European Union. The asylum-seekers say they left their countries of origin due to religious persecution. They are members of the [Ahmadi Religion of Peace and Light](#), a small minority religious group with thousands of members from around the world, many from a Muslim background.

Members of the Ahmadi Religion of Peace and Light, which was established in 1999, see their faith as an extension of Islam. They believe one of their leaders, Abdullah Hashem Aba Al-Sadiq, is the "Mahdi," a messianic figure and divine messenger who will bring salvation.

The group is not connected with the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, a group of 10 million to 20 million believers called Ahmadis who have also been [persecuted for their beliefs](#) in Muslim-majority countries.

The asylum-seekers presented themselves at the Kapikule border crossing point hoping to gain entry into the European Union by way of Bulgaria, but were instead herded onto buses and taken to a Turkish police station. Witnesses, including Foreman, reported that at the station, several group members were beaten, and women and children were forced to stand outside — without sleep, and without sitting or lying down — for three days.

On May 29, the group was transferred to the Edirne migration center, where witnesses reported being crammed into rooms and having insufficient water and soap, no sanitary

pads for women, poor food and inadequate medical care. Some reported beatings and sexual harassment.

Foreman, a freelancer who was at the border to create a documentary, was arrested along with the group and was released after two weeks.

"The weeks that I spent there was just so horrible. It was the worst experience I've ever been through. It was completely traumatizing," said Foreman, who is now back in the United Kingdom. "We want to get them out and safe, somewhere they can be safe to practice their faith. It's crazy that in 21st century they can't practice faith peacefully."

All but three of the members have been ordered to return to their countries of origin, including Thailand, Jordan, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Algeria and Azerbaijan, as well as the Palestinian territories. However, experts say these places are unsafe for the faith members.

"These followers are from a number of Islamic countries, and some are particularly brutal toward apostates," said Paul Diamond, a religious freedom lawyer in the United Kingdom. He told Religion News Service that regardless of how people view the religion or how small the group is, the believers at the Turkish border are "in a perilous situation" and "have a right to religious freedom."

Staying in Turkey isn't an option for the group either, according to Diamond. "They have no status in Turkey. And they don't want to claim asylum in Turkey because that's an Islamic country. It doesn't solve the problem."

Willy Fautré, director of the Brussels-based organization [Human Rights Without Frontiers](#), has been advocating for the detained members to receive humanitarian visas in European countries. He plans to plead their case at the annual Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe human rights conference in Warsaw, Poland, next month.

"We will push day after day, week after week, so that they finally accept them as immigrants in need of special protection because of their religious practices," Fautré told RNS.

On July 4, a group of U.N. experts, including Nazila Ghanea, [special rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief](#), and Felipe González Morales, [special rapporteur on the human rights of migrants](#), issued a statement asking Turkey not to deport the members.

"Since the inception of the Ahmadi Religion of Peace and Light in 1999, its members have been labelled as heretics and infidels and are often subjected to threats, violence, and illegal detention," the experts [said](#). "They are particularly at risk of detention due to blasphemy laws, in violation of their right to freedom of religion or belief."

In August, Turkish officials [responded](#) that deportation decisions had been conducted lawfully, though the deportation procedures have been halted pending an appeal of the decisions.

The group's leader, Aba Al-Sadiq, published "The Goal of the Wise" in 2022, a book of teachings faith members view as their gospel. Many of the faith's teachings, including its affirmation of reincarnation, the belief that we are living in the end times and an assertion that the Kaaba is in Petra, Jordan, are viewed by outsiders as controversial.

In an April 2023 [sermon](#), Aba Al-Sadiq declared that he is the messenger sent by God to invite humankind into the final covenant with God, a covenant that would save them from the imminent punishment of humanity via illness, meteors and global wars.

Hadil El-Khouly, the human rights outreach coordinator for the group, said the faith is often perceived as being radical because of its progressive teachings, including that women are not mandated to wear a headscarf, members don't need to do the five daily prayers and the group is open to LGBTQ people. (These beliefs are held by some members of mainstream Muslim groups as well.)

"I would say it is incredibly liberating, it is profoundly inclusive, and it's everything that I, as a human rights activist and person who seeks justice and freedom and peace in the world, was looking for," El-Khouly told RNS.

Foreman said that in Turkey, asylum-seekers were interrogated about teachings in "The Goal of the Wise," and some were sexually assaulted on the grounds that the faith accepts LGBTQ members.

"The aggression was just so extreme," she said, adding that LGBTQ people were among those detained.

On Aug. 22, after the arrest of eight members of the faith in Malaysia who protested in favor of LGBTQ rights, Aba Al-Sadiq released a [video statement](#) explicitly welcoming LGBTQ people who "believe in what we believe" to the faith. He had previously argued for the inclusion of LGBTQ people in his 2022 book.

One U.K.-based LGBTQ member of the faith, who asked to remain anonymous for safety reasons, told RNS that growing up, he'd been taught his sexual orientation doomed him to hellfire. Though he's now been a member of the Ahmadi Religion of Peace and Light for years, he was encouraged by the video announcement. "I know what many people go through, how alone they can feel, how hopeless. The rates of suicide testify to this. I was extremely happy to know that they can find out that they are welcome into religion and to God and into faith without compromising their own person."

UN urges Turkey not to deport persecuted Ahmadi religious minority

"Türkiye must not deport members of the Ahmadi Religion of Peace and Light seeking asylum": UN experts

[The European Times](#) (05.07.2023) - UN human rights experts* asked Turkey last Tuesday not to deport over 100 members of a persecuted religious minority who were seized last month at the Turkish-Bulgarian border. They also urged the government to do an accurate risk assessment of their situation in order to **avoid refoulement** (the practice of sending refugees or asylum seekers), which could result in serious violations of human rights. Two NGOs (CAP Freedom of Conscience and Human Rights Without Frontiers) also advocated for the same during a conference organized by the OSCE ODIHR.

The UN experts tell Türkiye Ahmadis are at risk

"Under international law, the Government of Türkiye is called to act in line with its obligation not to deport 101 members of the Ahmadi Religion of Peace and Light, who

may be at risk of serious human rights violations if they are returned to their countries of origin," the experts said.

On May 24, 2023, a group of [104 religious minorities](#), including 27 women and 22 children, arrived at the Turkish side of the Kapikule border, requesting asylum in Bulgaria. Turkish police allegedly used excessive force to stop them, injuring at least 30 members of the gathering, including nine women. Turkish authorities arrested them at the Edirne police station.

According to the experts, numerous people have been tortured or subjected to cruel, inhuman, or humiliating treatment by police officers, including beatings, sexual harassment, and purposeful sleep deprivation.

The group was subsequently moved to the deportation centre in Edirne, and the Turkish Ministry of Interior issued deportation orders for 101 people.

The UN experts stated:

"Since the inception of the Ahmadi Religion of Peace and Light in 1999, its members have been labelled as heretics and infidels and are often subjected to threats, violence, and illegal detention".

And further added that these Ahmadis:

"(Ahmadis) are particularly at risk of detention due to blasphemy laws, in violation of their right to freedom of religion or belief,"

The group consists of people who fled to Turkey from various Muslim-majority nations owing to religious persecution.

[According to the experts](#), one of those facing deportation spent six months in jail in his home country after being accused of offences such as insulting Islam and offending the Prophet. Another 15 have recently been released on bond after being arrested for belonging to a 'deviant cult' in their country.

"The prohibition of refoulement is absolute and non-derogable under international human rights and refugee law," the experts said.

"States are obliged not to remove any individual from their territory when there are substantial grounds to believe the person could be subjected to serious human rights violations in the State of destination," the UN experts said.

"Given the risks of human rights violations this group faces as a religious minority, Türkiye is required to make an individual, impartial and independent assessment of the protection needs of each person and the risks they may face if returned to their countries," the experts said.

Denouncing the situation at the OSCE

CAP Freedom of Conscience and Human Rights Without Frontiers, two well-known NGOs working to defend Freedom of Religion or Belief inside Europe and abroad, and who have been keeping the UN experts timely informed of the situation, also took the opportunity of the **Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting III** of the OSCE ODIHR meeting on **27 June 2023** in **Hofburg, Vienna**, [stated](#) that they:

"are deeply concerned about the situation of over 100 members of the Ahmadi Religion of Peace and Light who have been blocked by the Turkish authorities at the Turkish-Bulgarian border since the end of May. Ankara has decided to deport them back to their home countries where they would face imprisonment, torture and even execution in the case of Iran. They were denied entry of the European Union and faced violent treatment by the Turkish authorities, assaulting, kicking, and beating them with batons and firing gunshots in the air. Afterwards, they were transferred to the Edirne detention center where they still are. The Ahmadi Religion minority has been subjected to harsh persecution in numerous Muslim-majority countries such as Algeria, Morocco, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Malaysia, and Turkey because they are considered heretics. CAP/ Conscience et Liberté and Human Rights Without Frontiers urge Turkey to immediately annul all deportation orders and to grant them asylum in a safer land outside Turkey".

The experts: Nazila Ghanea, **Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief**; Felipe González Morales, **Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants**; Priya Gopalan (Chair-Rapporteur), Matthew Gillett (Vice-Chair on Communications), Ganna Yudkivska (Vice-Chair on Follow-Up), Miriam Estrada-Castillo, and Mumba Malila, **Working Group on arbitrary detention**; Fernand de Varennes, **Special Rapporteur on minority issues**.

The Special Rapporteurs, Independent Experts and Working Groups are part of what is known as the **Special Procedures** of the Human Rights Council. Special Procedures, the largest body of independent experts in the UN Human Rights system, is the general name of the Council's independent fact-finding and monitoring mechanisms that address either specific country situations or thematic issues in all parts of the world. Special Procedures' experts work on a voluntary basis; they are not UN staff and do not receive a salary for their work. They are independent from any government or organization and serve in their individual capacity.

Physical and sexual violence by police against 100+ Ahmadi asylum-seekers

[The European Times](#) (05.06.2023) - On 24 May, over 100 members of the Ahmadi Religion – women, children and elderly people – from eight Muslim-majority countries, where they are considered heretics, presented themselves at the Turkish-Bulgarian border to lodge a claim for asylum with the Bulgarian Border Police but they were denied access to it by the Turkish authorities.

A few days later, a Turkish court released a [deportation order](#). Many of them, especially in Iran, will face imprisonment and may be executed if they are sent back to their country of origin. On 2 June, the lawyers of the group lodged an appeal.

Willy Fautré interviewed Ms Hadil El Khouli, the spokesperson of the Ahmadi asylum-seekers, for The European Times. Hadil El Khouli is a member of the [Ahmadi Religion of Peace and Light](#) community in London and she is the human rights outreach coordinator at the religion.

Interviewing Hadil El Khouli

European Times: For several days, over 100 Ahmadis from seven countries have been stuck at the border between Turkey and Bulgaria. What is their situation?

Hadil El Khouli: I woke up on horrible news this morning that literally made my stomach turn.

Just as we filed an appeal yesterday against a deportation order by Turkish authorities to return 104 members of the Ahmadi [Religion](#) of Peace and Light, reports emerged of physical violence, torture and threats of sexual violence by the Turkish police in Edirne, against our members in detention.

A health report put together by the legal team representing the group shows that 32 out of 104 members in detention reported injuries and bruises from the beating, including 10 women and 3 children.

European Times: How did you get to know the testimony of one of the victims?

Hadil El Khouli: Through a leaked audio recording from inside detention, Puria Lotfiinalou, a 26-year-old Iranian youth, recounts harrowing details of the severe beatings he and other members endured. He said:

"They hit me and knocked my head on the ground. They took me to the police station, pulled my hair, hit me on the ground several times and beat me."

Physical violence was not the only form of abuse the group was exposed to. Puria then proceeded to narrate how Turkish Gendarmerie threatened him with sexual violence, asking him to perform oral sex on him, and saying that they would kill him if he tells anyone.

He said: *"Then they took me to the bathroom and here he told me that you should give me a blow job...they told us to falsely say that we are fine and if we don't say that we are fine, we will hit you and kill you."*

As Puria's disturbing account was heard over the phone, I could not get his voice out of my mind, a visible stutter could be heard out of fear and shock of what he witnessed.

European Times: What sort of violence were other Ahmadis subjected to?

Hadil El Khouli: Puria also added how even the most vulnerable people were not spared. Elderly men and women with bad health conditions, were beaten until they fell unconscious.

“They treat us like prisoners. Where I was, they beat a 75-year-old man and bruised his leg, and they didn’t even spare an old man. They even took sister Zahra (51 years old) and beat her. She fell unconscious on the ground and her condition was bad, but no one was even looking at her.”

Puria’s account is just one of many we have been receiving over the past few days from men and women of various ages and nationalities, showing Turkish authorities’ deliberate targeting of our members in detention. It is an outrageous violation of international [human rights](#) law, international refugee law and freedom of religion.

European Times: What do the Ahmadi asylum-seekers risk if they are sent back to their country of origin?

Hadil El Khouli: The 104 asylum seekers, including 27 women and 22 children from over seven different countries, come from Muslim-majority countries where they are considered heretics and infidels. They are at risk of cruel and inhumane treatment, imprisonment and even death sentence in a country like Iran if [Turkey](#) deports them back to their countries of origin.

European Times: How do the Turkish and foreign media cover this issue?

Hadil El Khouli: The tragedy of this pressing situation is being made worse by the media’s absence on the spot and lack of reporting on this issue. There was however a [Scottish journalist](#) who tried to cover the issue. He was beaten by the police and detained.

We have been struggling to get international media’s attention to properly report on such an urgent humanitarian crisis. The Turkish state media is reporting false news accusing the journalist of being an agent and a spy for the UK.

Turkey must be held accountable for these grave [human rights](#) abuses, the perpetrators must be prosecuted, reparations must be delivered and justice must be served for the victims.

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HRWF calls upon the UN, EU and OSCE to ask Turkey to annul a deportation order to 103 Ahmadis

By Willy Fautré, Human Rights Without Frontiers

[The European Times](#) (29.05.2023) - Today, a Turkish court has released a deportation order concerning 103 members of the Ahmadi Religion of Peace and Light from seven countries. Many of them, especially in Iran, will face imprisonment and may be executed if they are sent back to their country of origin.

Human Rights Without Frontiers (HRWF) in Brussels calls upon

- the United Nations and in particular the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, Ms Nazila Ghanea
- the European Union and in particular the EU Special Envoy on Freedom of Religion or Belief, Mr Frans Van Daele, as well as the European Parliament's Intergroup on Freedom of Religion or Belief
- the Special Envoys on Freedom of Religion or Belief appointed in the United Kingdom and in a number of EU Member States
- the OSCE/ ODIHR

to urge the Turkish authorities to cancel on appeal today's decision of deportation. The deadline for the appeal is Friday 2 June.

Media outlets all over Europe are raising the issue as an emergency situation as it can be seen in a few of many more articles in

[Global Voices](#)

[Metro](#)

[The Sofia Globe](#)

[La Fonte Libera](#)

[La Dama Deelche](#)

[The European Times](#)

[Human Rights Without Frontiers](#)

Moreover, [a petition](#) is being circulated.

The advocate and spokesperson of the 103 Ahmadis is **Hadil Elkhoully**. She is the author of the article hereafter published in Global Voices on 27 May and can be joined at the following **phone number for interviews: +44 7443 106804**

Persecuted Ahmadi Religion of Peace and Light minority denied asylum in Europe amidst escalating violence

Minority religious members fear death at home for alleged heresy

Hadil El Khoully



Members of the Ahmadi Religion of Peace and Light. [Kapikule border crossing](#), the gateway between Turkey and Bulgaria on Wednesday, May 24, 2023. Pictures owned by Ahmadi Religion of Peace and Light. Used with permission.

On the May 24, 2023, over 100 members of [the Ahmadi Religion of Peace and Light](#), a persecuted religious minority, [were denied entry and faced violent treatment](#) while seeking asylum at the Turkish–Bulgarian border. Women, children, and elderly were among those targeted by aggression, gunshots, threats, and the confiscation of their possessions.

Among those individuals was Seyed Ali Seyed Mousavi, a 40-year-old real estate agent from Iran. A few years ago, he attended a private wedding where his life took an unexpected turn. Seyed Mousavi found himself at the mercy of undercover police officers who abruptly grabbed him, forced him down, and subjected him to a severe beating. He was left to bleed for 25 minutes before someone finally sought medical assistance.

Seyed Mousavi’s only “crime” was his affiliation with this religious minority, which led to his persecution by the authorities in Iran. The incident forced him to make a difficult decision to leave his homeland behind, abandoning everything he knows in order to preserve his life.

The Ahmadi Religion, not to be confused with the [Ahmadiyya Muslim Community](#), is a religious community that was founded in 1999. It received [church status](#) in the USA on 6 June 2019. Today, this religion is practiced [in more than 30 countries](#) around the world. [It is headed by](#) Abdullah Hashem Aba Al-Sadiq and follows the teachings of Imam Ahmed al-Hassan as its divine guide.

State sponsored persecution

Since its inception in 1999, the Ahmadi Religion minority has been subjected to persecution in numerous nations. Countries including [Algeria](#), [Morocco](#), [Egypt](#), [Iran](#), [Iraq](#), [Malaysia](#), and [Turkey](#) have systematically oppressed them, imprisoned, threatened, and even tortured their members. This targeted discrimination is based on a belief that they are heretics.

In June 2022, Amnesty International called for the release of [21 members of the Ahmadi Religion in Algeria](#) who were charged with offenses including “participation in an unauthorized group” and “denigrating Islam.” Three individuals received one year prison sentences, while the remaining were sentenced to six months in prison along with fines.

Similarly, in Iran, in December 2022, a group of 15 followers of the same religion, including minors and women, [were detained](#) and transferred to the notorious [Evin Prison](#), where they were coerced to denounce their faith and defame their religion, despite not committing any crimes, nor preaching their faith openly. The charges brought against them were based on their opposition to “[Wilayat Al Faqih](#),” (the guardianship of the Islamic jurist) which grants authority to jurists and scholars who shape and enforce [Sharia law](#) in the country. The Iranian authorities [even aired a propaganda documentary](#) against the religion on national television.

Ahmadi Religion members have also [reported violence and threats](#) by state-sponsored militias in Iraq, leaving them vulnerable and unprotected. These incidents involved armed attacks targeting their homes and vehicles, with assailants openly declaring they are considered apostates deserving death, effectively denying them of any form of protection.

The persecution of the Ahmadi Religion stems from [its core teachings](#) that diverge from certain traditional beliefs within Islam. These teachings include the [acceptance of practices](#) such as consuming alcoholic beverages and recognizing the choice of women regarding [the wearing of the headscarf](#). Additionally, members of the religion question specific prayer rituals, including the notion of mandatory five daily prayers, and hold the belief that [the month of fasting \(Ramadan\) falls in December each year](#). They also challenge the traditional location of [the Kaaba](#), Islam's holiest site, asserting it is in [modern-day Petra, Jordan](#), rather than [Mecca](#).

The persecution of this religious minority has escalated significantly following the release of “[The Goal of the Wise](#),” the official gospel of their faith. The scripture was authored by Abdullah Hashem Aba Al-Sadiq, the religious leader who asserted to fulfill the role of the promised [Mahdi](#) awaited by Muslims to appear towards the end of times.

Braving the unknown towards freedom

Having gradually traveled to Turkey, over 100 members of the Ahmadi Religion received support from fellow members who had already settled there, fostering a sense of unity through their online connections. Despite the challenges they faced, they persevered in their quest to find a persecution-free home amidst their shared experiences of trauma.

Faced with this dire situation, they turned to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Bulgaria, the State Agency for Refugees (SAR), and the Bulgarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the hopes of securing a safe haven. Unfortunately, their plea for humanitarian visas was met with disappointment as all avenues proved unfruitful.

In light of their challenging circumstances, the group decided to gather at the official [Kapikule border crossing](#), the gateway between Turkey and Bulgaria on Wednesday, May 24, 2023, to request asylum directly from the Bulgarian Border Police. Their course of action aligns with the provisions set forth in [Article 58\(4\) of the Law on Asylum and Refugees \(LAR\)](#) which affirms that asylum can be sought by presenting a verbal statement to the border police.

[The Border Violence Monitoring Network](#), along with 28 other organizations, issued an [open letter](#) urging the Bulgarian authorities and to the European Border and Coast

Guard Agency (Frontex) to fulfill their obligations under European Union law, and international human rights law. These laws include Article 18 of the [EU Charter of Fundamental Rights](#), the 1951 Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, and Article 14 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

In Bulgaria, several [human rights organizations](#) have coordinated to grant protection to the group and allow them an opportunity to lodge an application for international protection at the Bulgarian border, [an effort that was spearheaded](#) by the [Association on Refugees and Migrants in Bulgaria](#). Many other organizations in Bulgaria have endorsed this statement, such as [Mission Wings](#) and the [Centre for Legal Aid, Voices in Bulgaria](#).

Their desperate bid for safety was encountered with [oppression and violence](#), as they were forcibly blocked by the Turkish authorities, subjected to [beatings with batons](#), and threatened with [gunshots](#). Now detained, their future remains uncertain. Their greatest fear is to be deported back to their homes, [where death might be waiting for them](#), due to their religious beliefs.

The perilous journey undertaken by this minority group raises crucial questions about the integrity of borders and the commitment of EU member states to uphold human rights. Their struggles serve as a reminder of the need for solidarity to protect basic human rights and preserve the dignity of everyone, regardless of their religious affiliation.

Over 100 Ahmadis at Turkish-Bulgarian frontier face imprisonment, or death if deported

Members of a religious minority detained at the Turkish-Bulgarian frontier face imprisonment and death if deported



Members of a religious minority detained at the Turkish-Bulgarian frontier face imprisonment and death if deported

[European Times](#) (27.05.2023) - More than one hundred members of The Ahmadi Religion of Peace and Light, a persecuted religious minority, who presented themselves at the Turkish-Bulgarian border on May 24 requesting asylum face deportation within the next seven to ten days, a decision that will most likely subject them to imprisonment or the death penalty in their home countries, according to a statement issued by the religious group. This is so according to an article published by The Sofia Globe, a Bulgarian independent news outlet aiming to inform for foreign and local readers about Bulgaria, Central and Eastern Europe.

The office of public safety in Edirne is currently holding the detainees, according to the statement.

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- **Ahmadis seeking asylum**
- **Ahmadis detained in Iran**

On Wednesday, the Turkish border police had denied them entry, violently beaten, forced them back, and detained them.

The statement stated that gunshots were discharged, the individuals were threatened, and their belongings were thrown away. Families, women, children, and the elderly make up this group.

The 104 individuals have been subjected to extreme and systematic forms of religious persecution throughout Muslim-majority nations, the statement said.

It was stated that the reason they encounter persecution is because they adhere to a man named Aba Al-Sadiq, whom they consider to be the anticipated Mahdi.

They adhere to his controversial message, which includes the formation of a new Covenant after Islam.

The controversial teachings of this Covenant include that the headscarf is not required, the month of Ramadan occurs in December, the five daily prayers are abolished, and the consumption of alcohol is permitted. Due to their beliefs, they were labeled as "heretics" and "infidels," which presented a serious danger to their lives.

In countries including Iran, Iraq, Algeria, Egypt, Morocco, Azerbaijan, and Thailand, they had been beaten, imprisoned, abducted, humiliated, and terrorized, according to the statement.

Ahmadis seeking asylum

They had gathered in Turkey and were on their way to the Turkish-Bulgarian border to exercise their human right to request asylum directly from the Bulgarian Border Police, in accordance with Article 58(4) of the Law on Asylum and Refugees, which states that asylum can be requested with a verbal statement presented to the border police.

In addition, [an open letter](#) was sent by the European Border Violence Monitoring Network (BVMN) on May 23, 2023, with 28 human rights organizations and bodies endorsing it, urging the protection of the group and the upholding of their right to claim asylum at the border in accordance with international law, according to the statement.

After being detained at the Edirne public safety office for more than 24 hours, 83 of the group's members have been transferred to a deportation center, with the remaining 20 members likely to follow. Decisions regarding deportation are anticipated to be made within 36 hours.

Ahmadis detained in Iran

In Iran, in December 2022, members of the Ahmadi Religion of Peace and Light were detained at Evin prison due to their religious beliefs. They were threatened with execution if they did not sign documents to renounce their faith and defame the religion. In a similar fashion, members in Iraq have been subjected to gun attacks on their residences by armed militias, and scholars have called for their execution.

Türkiye's decision to deport these families would constitute a clear violation of the fundamental principle of non-refoulement, which, under international refugee and human rights law, prohibits the return of individuals to a country where they would face torture, cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment, or other irreparable harm.

"We implore Türkiye not to proceed with the deportation of these families to their countries of origins. These families would be put in danger in their countries of origin and Türkiye would be responsible for any loss of life if they are returned to the countries they have escaped from," said the statement.

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*



Turkish-Bulgarian border (Credit: Sofia Globe)

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
