

URGENT ACTION

SYRIAN-PALESTINIANS FACE FORCIBLE RETURN

The Egyptian authorities are preparing to forcibly return two Palestinian refugees from Syria back to Syria or to Gaza. The men were part of a group of 15 who fled the conflict in Gaza, 13 of whom were forcibly returned to Syria on 14 August.

Youssef Farid Youssef, 23, and **Hamza Issa**, 20, fled Syria in 2013 to escape the crisis that began in the country in 2011. They travelled to Gaza and lived there for one year. They fled Gaza because of Israel's military operation which began on 8 July in the Gaza Strip, placing it under intensive bombardment from air, land and sea.

However, the Egyptian security forces arrested them when they left Gaza via the Rafah crossing on 9 August, along with 13 other Palestinian refugees from Syria, and told them they had two options: either to be forcibly returned to Gaza or to Syria. The Egyptian authorities took their passports, and transferred all 15 to detention at Cairo International Airport the next day.

Thirteen of them were forcibly returned to Syria on 14 August. Youssef Farid Youssef and Hamza Issa are now at risk of forcible return as well. They do not know when they will be forcibly returned, or to where. They do not have enough money for food.

Please write immediately in Arabic, English or your own language:

- Urging the authorities not to forcibly return Youssef Farid Youssef and Hamza Issa to Syria or Gaza;
- Urging them to uphold their international obligations, under the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1969 Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa, to provide international protection for those fleeing serious human rights violations and the armed conflict in Syria.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 26 SEPTEMBER 2014 TO:

Minister of the Interior
 Mohamed Ibrahim
 Ministry of the Interior
 25 El Sheikh Rihan Street
 ab al-Louk, Cairo, Egypt
 Fax: +202 279 455 29
Salutation: Dear Minister

Public Prosecutor
 Hesham Mohamed Zaki Barakat
 Office of the Public Prosecutor
 Supreme Court House, 1 "26 July" Road
 Cairo, Arab Republic of Egypt
 Fax: +202 2 577 4716
 +202 2 575 7165
 (switched off after office hours, GMT+3)
Salutation: Dear Counsellor

And copies to:
Deputy Assistant Minister of Foreign
Affairs for Human Rights
 Mahy Hassan Abdel Latif
 Multilateral Affairs and International
 Security Affairs
 Ministry of Foreign Affairs
 Corniche al-Nil, Cairo
 Arab Republic of Egypt
 Fax: +202 2 574 9713
 Email: Contact.Us@mfa.gov.eg

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please insert local diplomatic addresses below:

Name Address 1 Address 2 Address 3 Fax Fax number Email Email address Salutation Salutation

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

AMNESTY
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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

People who have fled the conflict in Syria, including both Syrian nationals and Palestinian refugees who were living in Syria, are now fleeing discrimination and human rights violations in Egypt. In recent months they have been subjected to verbal attacks and threats in the media and by public figures, arbitrary arrest, unlawful detention and – in some cases – forcible return.

The conflict in Syria and the widespread human rights violations, war crimes and crimes against humanity being perpetrated there mean that all those fleeing Syria should be considered refugees under the 1951 Convention or the 1969 Organization of African Unity (OAU) Convention, or both.

In light of the serious human rights concerns ongoing in Gaza, including a deterioration of the economic and humanitarian situation, continuing incursions by the Israeli forces, and the cumulative difficulties faced by residents, Amnesty International believes that those fleeing the area should be considered at risk of serious harm of human rights violations and afforded protection against forcible return.

At least 6,000 Palestinian refugees from Syria are living in Egypt. The Egyptian authorities have had a longstanding unofficial policy of pressuring the UN refugee agency (UNHCR) not to consider Palestinian asylum claims, including claims made by those fleeing the conflict in Syria. This leaves Palestinian refugees unable to enjoy international protection in Egypt, in clear violation of Egypt's international obligations.

There is a common misconception, propagated by the Egyptian government's refusal to meet its obligations towards Palestinian refugees, that Palestinians are not eligible for refugee protection. The 1951 Convention excludes from protection Palestinians receiving assistance or protection from the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) in its areas of operation, which are Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, the West Bank and Gaza. However, in Egypt, which is not an UNRWA area of operation, Palestinians are eligible for refugee status under the 1951 Convention. They are also eligible for refugee protection under the 1969 OAU Convention.

This Egyptian authorities' policy has meant that UNHCR is unable to intervene on behalf of Palestinian refugees, even when they are sent back to Syria.

For further information on the situation of Palestinian refugees from Syria, please also refer to Amnesty International report *Lebanon: Denied refuge: Palestinians from Syria seeking safety in Lebanon* of July 2014 (Index number: MDE 18/002/2014).

Names: Youssef Farid Youssef, Hamza Issa
Gender m/f: m

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