
Refoulement of refugees from Somaliland to Ethiopia

Press Release 30 December 2011

Twenty refugees from Ethiopia were detained by Somaliland security forces on 22 December and are believed to have been handed over to Ethiopian forces at the border town of Wachale on 28 December, against international law.

The government of Somaliland warned 90,000 immigrants that they had to leave several months ago and at least half had left when the government, responding to a request from the Ethiopian government at the beginning of September, announced it was cracking down on illegal immigrants. Ethiopia requested the return of 500 political refugees, mostly Oromo accused of supporting the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF).

At the beginning of 2011, in order to encourage their integration into the local community, UNHCR withdrew allowances to two thirds of the 470 recognised refugees and their families. In October, the Somaliland government announced that it was no longer legal to employ or rent property to illegal immigrants. Employers and landlords, many of whom by this time were owed several months rent, did not distinguish refugees and asylum-seekers from illegal immigrants.

The refugees and more than 2400 registered asylum-seekers (plus many more who wished to register) were therefore made destitute. Fearing imprisonment, torture and other abuses if they returned to Ethiopia, several hundred refugees and asylum-seekers camped at the Social Welfare Centre, run by Save the Children and funded by UNHCR, in the capital.

A number of Oromo, Eritrean and Ogadeni refugees have been refouled from Somaliland to Ethiopia in recent years, including earlier in 2011 (see below). At least three recognised refugees were taken on 25/26 October and at least one on 10 November.

Following a visit by the Interior Ministry to the Social Welfare Centre the previous day, a delegation of 20 refugee representatives, including five women, met at the Interior Ministry with UNHCR on 22 December. When the refugee delegates refused to agree to move from the Social Welfare Centre, they were taken away in two police vehicles.

On 28 December they were reported by several sources to be in detention in Wachale. According to one source they were handed over to Ethiopian security forces at midday.

The refoulement of recognised refugees contravenes the UN Convention on Refugees. The remaining refugees, asylum-seekers and undocumented migrants in Somaliland are at risk of being forcibly repatriated to Ethiopia.

The twenty, including two breast-feeding mothers, who are feared to have been refouled on 28 December are:

Abdurahman Yousuf Mohamed	758-08C00303
Abdulaziz Ahmed Ali	758-06C00349
Abdele Tefo (Tato/Tabso Nure)	REC/0355/08
Abdeta Saniyo (Sayo/Saliye Yuye)	758-08C00224
Abyot Abera Gebre-Selassie	758-04C0027
Amina Mohamed Umar	
Amir Tamam Hassan	REC/0344/08
Araya Berhanu Rada	758-04C002
Fatuma Jibril	
Getachew Feyisa Sarda	758-08C00146
Hawa Mume	
Junedin Ali Mergan	
(Barsisa) Kalif Hassen Ahmed	REC/0554/08
Mohamed Aliyi Haji	
Mohamed Nure Ibrahim (Ali)	REC/1238/08
Mohamed Yusuf Mustefa	758-06C00081
Nasir Usmael Muse	RF/SOMHA/07C002
Sada Mohamed Ali	
Said Tumo (Tulu) Nure	REC/0231/08
Shito Aliyi	

Other recent incidents of refoulement from Somaliland:

Recognised refugee Abdusalam Haji Muktar was detained on 20 April 2011 in Hargeisa. Despite the efforts of UNHCR, he was refouled 3-4 months later. Refugees Reyad Kemal Hussien (file no.758-04C00245), Ali Ibrahim Haji and Abdurahman Mohamed Qabattoo (aka Sheikh Abdurahman Qabattoo) were seized during the night on 25/26 October; Abdishukuur Mohamed Usman (file no. 2006/055) was taken at midnight 10 November. These are believed to have been refouled. Another man, taken in the same period, escaped from detention.

OSG calls on supporters to register their concerns, about these episodes of refoulement and the possibility of more incidents, with diplomatic missions of the Republic of Somaliland and with UNHCR representatives in their host countries.