

## **FOLLOW UP STATEMENT ON THE TREATMENT OF THE AHMADI RELIGIOUS GROUP IN TURKEY:**

A [previous statement](#) signed by 29 civil society organisations and groups informed of the intention of 103 members of the Ahmadi Religion of Peace and Light to approach the official Kapikule border crossing point from Turkey in order to claim asylum in Bulgaria. The statement was sent as an open letter to Frontex, who are present along the Bulgarian-Turkish border, and the General Directorate of the Border Police in Bulgaria, urging them to fulfil their fundamental rights obligations and allow the group to lodge claims for international protection in Bulgaria. The group had first exhausted all efforts to gain entry to the country via humanitarian visas and tried to access the country legally by approaching the official crossing point.

On May 24th, the group approached the Kapikule border crossing point from the Turkish side and were prevented from reaching Bulgaria to lodge their claims for international protection. The group reported that they were met with extreme violence including [being beaten](#) with batons, [shots being fired in the air](#), and [being forced into buses](#). From there they were taken to the Edirne Provincial Gendarmeria Command where they were detained for two days. They were then transferred to the Edirne Migration Centre where, at the time of writing, they are still being detained. On 29th May each member of the group was issued with a return decision to their countries of origin, including Iraq, Iran, Algeria, Azerbaijan, Jordan, Thailand and Palestine. The return decisions are all currently being appealed. Members of the religious group have faced [arrest](#), [prison sentences](#), [death threats](#) and [attacks](#) in their countries of origin (as explained in the previous statement). If returned, they face a risk of further persecution and of violations of their rights, including the right to be free from torture, inhuman or degrading treatment and their right to life.

Further [reports](#) have been released by the group and covered by [local media](#) which complain of [inadequate conditions and allege that violence](#) has been enacted upon the group during their detention. Individuals state they have been beaten, injected with unknown substances, forced to sign documents without translation, and sexually harassed. The group has reported that 30 members have sustained serious injuries, with 10 women and [two children](#) among them.

In light of the above information we, the undersigned, call for the annulment of return decisions against the group, the cessation of violent practices against them, and for their release from detention given the reports of the circumstances they are being held in. In the previous statement we explained that the group had exhausted all options to obtain humanitarian visas with which to enter Bulgaria legally and submit a claim for international protection and be afforded a full and individualised assessment.

This case has demonstrated, yet again, that there are no viable legal pathways with which to claim asylum in the European Union, forcing people to seek dangerous alternatives to reach protection. Whilst Turkey has been deemed a safe third country for asylum applicants, the reality is quite different. Turkey is a member state to the 1951 Geneva Convention and its 1967 Protocol but, when acceding, declared not to lift the 'geographical limitation' - meaning citizens of non-European countries are prevented from receiving protection in full. This leaves "the vast majority of persons seeking international protection in Türkiye" unable to

“apply for fully-fledged refugee status but for ‘conditional refugee’ status and subsidiary protection only”, which is why the European Commission labels the asylum legislation in Turkey as [only “partially aligned with the EU acquis”](#). [Barriers to accessing protection are high](#), especially since UNHCR’s withdrawal in 2018, and there is [widespread acknowledgement](#) of insufficient consideration of specific protection or reception needs of vulnerable groups.

The return orders issued to the members of the Ahmadi group once again demonstrate these barriers to accessing protection, furthermore the risks they face as a religious minority (outlined in the [first statement](#)) ascertain that Turkey is not a safe third country for many asylum applicants who seek to lodge claims for protection within the EU.

**Signatories:**

President of the Ahmadi Religion of Peace and Light  
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Associations et des Particuliers pour la Liberté de Conscience  
Northern Lights Aid  
Set My People Free (Sweden)  
Center for Studies on New Religions (CESNUR), Torino, Italy  
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Association on Refugees & Migrants in Bulgaria (ARM-BG)  
Be Aware And Share  
Centre for Legal Aid - Voice in Bulgaria  
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The Border Violence Monitoring Network  
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InterEuropean Humanitarian Aid Association  
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Free the Slaves