

Organization for Defending Victims of Violence (ODVV)

Sweden

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About ODVV

1. The Organization for Defending Victims of Violence (ODVV) is a non-governmental, non-profit, non-partisan organization in Special Consultative Status to the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC). The ODVV was established in 1988 in Tehran and has been active in the field of human rights and humanitarian activities.

2. The ODVV is also associated to the United Nations Department of Public Information (UNDPI), a participatory of the NGOs Coalition for an International Court (based in New York), and national coordinator of the Global March Against Child Labour (based in New Delhi) which cooperated in a variety of issues with international organizations and has working relations with many NGOs in Iran and around the globe.

3. The ODVV is also a member of the International Organization against Small and Light Weapons, and the UN Conference of Non-Governmental Organizations (CONGO), and the International Movement for a Just World (JUST), AMAN Network of Rehabilitation Centres in the Middle East and North Africa, International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims (IRCT).

4. During the last 2 decades, we have done so many activities, mainly informative in regards with human rights and supportive in regards with the victims of violence. Various human rights education courses, workshops, seminars, conferences have been held or co-held by the ODVV for various sectors of society: civil society institutions and governmental organizations.

5. Other Activities:

- Participation in UN Commission on Human Rights annual sessions, and the new Human Rights Council sessions in Geneva. Written and oral statements on various items of the agenda are issued by the ODVV.
- Internship for foreign students
- Publication of different books and booklets on human rights such as Rights of the Child, Racism, Racial Discrimination and Xenophobia. Publication of Defenders Newsletter (English), human rights news and developments bulletin (Farsi), Rights of the Child bulletin (Farsi)

- Daily electronic human rights newsletter in English and Farsi

Summary

6. One of the ODVV's research activities is the study of the conditions of refugees and asylum-seekers at the international level, and since a very large portion of these asylum-seekers is made up of Iraqis, the highest percentage of asylum-seekers acceptance belongs to Sweden, the conditions of this group became the centre of attention of this Organization. This report tries to while note the positive actions taken by the Swedish government in the protection of Iraqi refugees and asylum-seekers, to also draw a picture of the problems that Iraqis face in this process and also provide recommendations.

Background

7. Sweden is one of the industrialized countries that has proportionately accepted more Iraqi refugees than other European countries. The Swedish Central Statistics Department announced that in 2008 the number of Iraqis living in Sweden had reached to 109,446, whereas in 2007 there were 97,513, and in 2000 there were 49,000 Iraqis living in the country.

8. These figures were produced following the actions of governments with regards to the protection of refugees in the ministers' summit of EU countries on 27 November 2008, regarding the sheltering of Iraqi asylum-seekers in EU member states; and following this Sweden became the host country with the largest Iraqi refugees population.

9. This is while the rush of Iraqi refugees has cause problems for the Swedish government, problems such as: jobs, schools, housing, migrant population explosion in some parts of the country.

10. This resulted in Sweden to adopt new decisions with regards to the granting of asylum to Iraqis, which are contrary to the international commitments of the country. The Swedish Immigration Department announced that there were no military conditions in Iraq any longer and therefore the number of accepted asylum-seekers were dropped and following this the Swedish and Iraqi governments reached an agreement on forced repatriation of these refugees back to Iraq. The forced repatriation of refugees back to their country and as a result the threat to their safety was the result of this decision which damaged the positive moves that the Swedish government had made with regards to the protection of Iraqi refugees.

11. This is while UNHCR spokesman, Andre Mahsis announced that all countries must refrain from repatriating Iraqis back to Iraq until the improvement of the security and human rights conditions in the country.

12. A number of other countries have also reached agreements with the Iraqi government regarding the voluntary or forced repatriation of Iraqis to their country.

Cause for concern

13. Since refugees and asylum-seekers are mostly people with no prospects of returning to Iraq, and religious minorities, torture victims or women victims of sexual abuse are included in this group, therefore the forced repatriation of this group can bring along difficult conditions for these people.

14. As a nongovernmental human rights organization, the ODVV expresses its deepest concern over the dangerous conditions of Iraqi refugees and asylum-seekers and reminds that respecting human rights, for the acceptance and better protection of refugees in asylum providing countries is of significant importance. Improvement of human rights in source countries for resolving refugees problems through voluntary repatriation is necessary, and the protection of human rights in home countries is the best way to prevent people from turning to asylum-seeking.

Recommendations

15. The ODVV believes that the diversity and complexity of refugees' issues today shall not be resolved through separate ways. What is necessary is a comprehensive approach towards this issue. For the UNHCR this method means concentration on support and protection, and not only the destination country but the source country too must do this so that the refugee problem is prevented and or reduced.

16. Governments must take care so that during emergency conditions to be able to respond to sudden waves of refugees and asylum-seekers and cope with the special support needs for women and children and other vulnerable groups.

17. Finally governments must within the UN system framework must have further active participation in unpredictable and dangerous situations so that countries that are inundated with waves of refugees and asylum-seekers receive necessary assistance.

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