

Dangerous precedent with far-reaching impact: How Denmark's withdrawal of protection affects Syrian refugees in Denmark and abroad

***Press conference,
10 March 2022, 10:00-12:00,
Vartov, Store Sal, Farvergade 27, 1463 København***

Participants:

*Nadia Hardman, Human Rights Watch
Lisa Blinkenberg, Amnesty International
Nadine Kheshen, Alef Lebanon, Refugee Protection Watch
Haya Atassi, Syrian Association for Citizens' Dignity
Michala Clante Bendixen, Refugees Welcome*

Denmark's decision to withdraw protection for Syrian refugees from Damascus and Damascus countryside creates attention in many countries hosting Syrian refugees, and there is a risk that it may inspire other countries to follow.

This press conference will discuss the recent reports documenting the harsh reality in Syria to which refugees are supposed to return, the condemnations of the Danish Immigration Service's report by experts who provided information for it and the implications of the policy for other countries hosting Syrian refugees, such as Lebanon, and the possible long-term consequences of premature return, including further displacement of even larger numbers of Syrians.

We will also shed a light on how the Danish decisions were influenced by the country's political agenda, and the impact of the government's policy on the lives of Syrian refugees in Denmark.

We urge the Danish government to change its policy, as it is in direct conflict with the official position of the European Commission and the UNHCR's protection thresholds, which need to be met before Syrians can return in safety and dignity.

The policy serves as a dangerous precedent for other European countries, but, even more dangerously, for countries like Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey, which host large numbers of Syrian refugees and where increasing number of politicians are calling for a premature and, in some cases, even forced return of Syrians. At the same time, there is overwhelming evidence that Syria is not safe for return and that returnees face detention, arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearance, torture and extortion.

The assessments made by the Danish Refugee Appeals Board (RAB) have clearly failed to consider the real threat facing refugees if they were to return. The report from Danish Immigration Service on which the decisions were based was ultimately disowned by the majority of sources used for the assessment; they failed to seriously take into account credible information from Syrian and international organisations about the threats facing returnees.

The research conducted for this press conference showed that all the vast majority of experts interviewed for the report claimed that its assessment is contrary to the information they provided and that they would not cooperate with Danish Immigration Service in the same way again, as it looks into other areas of Syria.

Furthermore, the decision to withdraw protection from Syrian refugees runs counter to Denmark's own foreign policy relating to Syria, regarding the dangerous nature of the security state and the need for accountability and justice for those detained in Syria prisons, as illustrated by the statement of the Danish Minister of Foreign Affairs Jeppe Kofod: *"Long term stability requires a negotiated end to the conflict. It requires the regime to change its behaviour. The abuses the Syrian people rose up against are continuing. This must stop now."*

The working language of the event will be English, and online streaming will be available.

Attending the conference is free of charge, but registration is necessary. Please write to: kontakt@refugees.dk and tell us if you want to attend physically or have us send you a link to the streaming.

Relevant reports and documents are available here: refugeeswelcome.dk/syria

For more information, please contact:

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