

An appeal for the release of ten Syrians detained by the Cypriot Authorities

15th of January 2020

Several Syrian asylum seekers are on an open-ended hunger strike after being detained in the immigration detention center of Menoyia in the Greek part of the Republic of Cyprus. The center is designated for foreign asylum seekers who were rejected and are facing problems in issuing or renewing their residency.

On the 8th of January 2020, about ten Syrian asylum seekers started a hunger strike to protest the extremely bad detention conditions. In a statement to the VDC, they said that they are "sleeping in an extremely cold hall which lacks heating and sufficient blankets". They also stated that they are afraid of refoulement to Syria -where they could face a great risk- after being detained without formal charges.

VDC communicated with several detainees who confirmed that their detention in Menoyia Center was under the pretext of being considered as a danger to the national security, despite that they requested asylum through due process.

According to the first article of the Article 31 of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, the illegal entry of the Syrian asylum seekers, coming directly from a territory where their life or freedom was threatened, does not provide sufficient reason to impose penalties on them by the Cypriot Government. The Article 32 of the same Convention states that the asylum seeker has the right to clear himself of any charges if the Cypriot Government considers him as a threat to its national security, and it is not allowed to forcibly send them to their homeland if a decision of their expulsion was reached. Additionally, the asylum seeker shall be given a reasonable period to seek legal admission into a third country.

Accordingly:

- VDC calls upon the Cypriot authorities, a signatory of the Dublin regulation of 1990 and its amendments concerning the regulation of refugees status in EU countries, to accelerate the examination of the applications of the detainees in Menoyia Center, and to promptly inform them of its decision in relation to their requests.
- VDC confirms that the principle of "non-refoulement" is a basic principle in the international law as it is enshrined in several international and regional conventions. This principle imposes the commitment of all countries, including the Republic of Cyprus, to not force refugees and asylum

seekers to return to the territories where their life or freedom was threatened, according to the Article 33 of the Refugee Convention. Knowing that, the refoulement of refugees and asylum seekers to the Syrian territories could expose them to detention which could result in torture and ill-treatment.

- VDC calls upon the UNHCR to assume its responsibilities by intervening to release the detainees. VDC calls upon Cypriot humanitarian organizations to support the release of the detainees while taking into consideration that they should not be forcibly returned to Syrian territories where they face a serious risk.
- VDC calls upon all human rights organizations and activists in this field to support the alleviation of suffering of the detainees in the Cypriot detention centers, and to call upon their release or to assign lawyers in their defense at the very least. Additionally, we call upon them to assign translators to facilitate the communication between the detainees and the Cypriot authorities.
- VDC calls upon all humanitarian and international organizations to aid the hunger strikers who have been suffering psychological and physical deterioration due to the bad detention conditions.

