JORDAN IS EXCLUDING NON-SYRIAN REFUGEES FROM PROTECTION

ACHRS STATEMENT | MARTINE RØNDE BJERG

Jordan is discriminating against refugees based on nationality.

Non-Syrian refugees in Jordan are not provided with the same funding or support that Syrian refugees are. Both Syrian and non-Syrian refugees flee from similarly dangerous and insecure conditions, yet non-Syrians are in practice excluded from obtaining asylum status. Jordan's treatment of non-Syrian refugees violates the international principles of non-refoulment and non-discrimination of refugees based on their nationality.

Since the outbreak of the Syrian civil war, Jordan has taken in around 1.36 million Syrian refugees. These refugees have legal access to education, health services and the labour market. This treatment of refugees has developed the reputation of Jordan as being "refugee-friendly", as it is the second largest host country of refugees.

However, this reputation is contrasted with the treatment of non-Syrian refugees.

In January 2019, Jordan stopped the United Nations' Refugee Agency (UNHCR) from registering as asylum seekers anyone who enters the country for the purposes of medical treatment, tourism, study, or work — which means essentially excludes all non-Syrians from being recognized as refugees. This leads to non-Syrian refugees being in the country illegally, making them even more vulnerable to exploitation and harassment.

According to researcher Dina Baslan, the freezing of UNHCR asylum registration sends a clear message from the Jordanian authorities that non-Syrian refugees are not welcome.

According to Human Rights Watch, Jordanian authorities are deporting Yemeni, Sudanese and Syrian asylum seekers "in violation of the international principle of non-refoulement, which prohibits countries from returning

people to a country where they may face persecution or serious harm". Jordan maintains its ability to deport such refugees, as it is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention.

This, and Jordan's state sovereignty, means that it is not bound to the principle of non-refoulement, nor to the prohibition of not discriminating against refugees based on their nationality.

Sudanese and Yemeni people fleeing violence, persecution and famine-like conditions are overlooked by the Jordanian government. As the war in Syria rightfully sparked lots of attention, funding and protection programs, refugees fleeing other nations are mostly left out of the international media spotlight and funding. Therefore, nationalities other than Syrians have less access to services and often fewer legal rights.

Despite limited funding, UNHCR has continued to aid non-Syrian refugees in Jordan. However, obtaining government approval for projects targeting non-Syrian asylum seekers and refugees is a difficult and convoluted. The aid application will need to be approved by several government departments and at every stage, has the possibility of being denied. The result is that any aid and support are insufficient and inaccessible for these groups of people.

ACHRS acknowledges and encourages existing initiatives supporting non-Syrian refugees, such as the One Refugee Group, which advocates reducing and ultimately eliminating differences in refugees' rights and services based on nationality. NGO's and research centres working with One Refugee Group should be supported in doing so, as seeking protection is a basic human right that should not be dependent on one's nationality.

ACHRS condemns discrimination against refugees of different nationalities and urges Jordan to stop the freezing of UNHCR asylum registration for non-Syrians.
ACHRS urges Jordan to ratify the 1951 Refugee Convention, besides facilitating a better process for the NGO's applying for permission to carry out non-Syrian aid projects.

ACHRS also encourages the international community to reserve funding for all refugees regardless of nationality.

Picture source: UNHCR/Jose Cendon

(The National News; 7iber; Middle Eastern Eye; UNHCR; One Refugee.org; Reliefweb; UN refugees.org)