

## background information

About 50,000 African asylum seekers and refugees live in Israel. We have fled persecution, forced military conscription, dictatorship, civil wars and genocide. Instead of being treated as refugees by the government of Israel, we are treated as criminals. We live here with no access to basic services, such as health and welfare.

A range of unprecedented policy changes has caused us to take drastic measures to display our discontent, frustration and fear. Since the arrival of asylum seekers and refugees in Israel we have asked the Israeli government to improve their asylum policies, recognize us as refugees and give us our rights accordingly. Instead, with every year that passes, we have been criminalized, met with xenophobia and increasingly dehumanizing policies.

On December 11, 2013 the government of Israel passed a new amendment to the Prevention of Infiltration law, in response to the recent High Court of Justice (HCJ) decision that overturned previous amendments to the law. In its decision, the Court called the law "a grave and disproportionate abuse of the right to personal freedom" and against Israel's basic laws.

The new amendments allow for one year of closed detention followed by indefinite detention without judicial review in 'open' facility Holot, in the Negev desert far from population centers. Individuals held in Holot are banned from working and are subjected to roll call three times each day, restricting travel outside of the immediate area. Holot is closed at night. The law gives the staff of the facility the ability to demand identification as well as to search, prevent entry, apprehend and remove individuals. If an individual breaches or is accused of intending to breach a condition of the 'open' facility, or is alleged to endanger the security of public peace, he can be transferred to a closed prison for three to twelve months.

Inspectors from the Population, Immigration and Border Authority (PIBA) have begun to arrest and detain hundreds of asylum seekers in Tel Aviv. In the last week of December 2013, PIBA announced its plan to require thousands of asylum seekers and refugees to register at Holot within 30 days. Despite assurances given by the Ministry of Interior that families would not be separated, tens of men with wives and children said they have been summoned. Panic has spread among the asylum seekers community in Israel, as immigration authorities have increasingly limited the ability to renew visas, leaving people vulnerable to losing their jobs and being arrested.

In the past weeks, thousands of African asylum seekers and refugees took to the street in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv to march for freedom, to oppose arrests, imprisonment and Israel's disregard for refugee rights. The current strike expresses our fear of imprisonment and deportation and pressure the government to change their inhumane policies.

Refugee prisoners in Saharonim jail are on ongoing hunger strike since 5 January 2014.

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