

For the attention of:

General Directorate of Border Police, Bulgaria
The Executive Director of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex)
The Fundamental Rights Officer of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency

We, the undersigned, are writing to urge you to fulfil the fundamental rights obligations Bulgaria are bound by under the Law on Asylum and Refugees, Article 18 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, Directive 2013/32/EU, the 1951 Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and Article 14 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, namely the right to asylum and to a full and fair individualised assessment with the right to appeal for a group of 103 members of the [Ahmadi Religion of Peace and Light](#). We reiterate that all persons should be guaranteed access to EU territory to apply for international protection, regardless of their individual claim.

There is currently a group of 103 members of the faith who have gathered in Turkey after having fled persecution in their home countries - Algeria, Iran, Iraq, Azerbaijan, Jordan, Thailand, and Palestine. Members of the Ahmadi religion have been labelled as 'heretics' and 'infidels' in many countries due to their beliefs, a trend they report has worsened since the release of their gospel, 'The Goal of the Wise', in December 2022. Members of the faith report that a number of the claims written in the book are considered 'heretical' in that they are considered contrary to other religious beliefs. These views, the group state, have led to their persecution through accusations of 'denigrating Islam'. In fact, in [Algeria](#) and [Iran](#) members have faced arrest and prison sentences for exactly this, being forbidden for exercising their rights to religious freedom, and in [Iraq](#) they have suffered gunned attacks on their homes by armed militias, and scholars have called for them to be killed.

For the above reasons, many members of the group decided to flee their home countries and pursue their right to seek protection and freedom to practise their religion. They do not feel safe to lodge an application for international protection in Turkey due to the consistently documented [violations of religious freedoms](#), including the criminalisation of blasphemy or expressions deemed insulting to religious beliefs. Although Turkey is a secular country, President Erdoğan has [close ties to the Muslim Brotherhood](#) and, in fact, a [2022 report from the European Parliament](#) warns that, in Turkey, religious minorities face "sustained legal and administrative pressure". Furthermore, the criminalisation of blasphemy under Article 216(3) of the Turkish Penal Code shrinks any space for views that are different to the country's mainly practised Sunni Islam. In fact, Turkish singer Sezen Aksu received [massive backlash](#) for lyrics that describe Adam and Eve, considered holy figures in Islam, as 'ignorant', with President Erdoğan promising to ["rip out the tongues"](#) of those who insult religious figures. This event has been pointed out by the Ahmadi group as one reason for their fear that their beliefs would be persecuted and considered 'heretical' in Turkey.

In light of this, the group do not feel safe to lodge their applications for international protection in Turkey as they fear they will be faced with similar persecution to that which they have fled in their own countries. As a result, they have tried to seek legal pathways to Bulgaria and have contacted the UNHCR in Bulgaria, the State Agency for Refugees (SAR), and even the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to request a visa on humanitarian grounds. All these efforts have been unsuccessful. As a result, they are planning to present themselves at the

official Kapikule border crossing point between Turkey and Bulgaria next week, to request asylum in front of the Bulgarian Border Police. We, the undersigned, urge that this request be respected, in line with the Art, 58(4) of the Law on Asylum and Refugees (LAR) which states asylum can be applied for with a verbal statement submitted in front of the border police. We further urge the Bulgarian authorities to respect Article 279(5) of the Bulgarian Criminal Code which denotes that border crossing is not a criminal offence if you are crossing to seek asylum.

The above information has demonstrated that the group have a well-founded fear of religious persecution, and risk their right to freedom of expression, if they are forced to return to their home countries or to remain in Turkey. Therefore we, the undersigned, call for their applications for international protection to be registered/lodged and treated with full, individualised assessments in Bulgaria in line with national law, European Union law and international human rights law.

Signatories:

Border Violence Monitoring Network
Mobile Info Team
Northern Lights Aid
Collective Aid
Mission Wings Foundation
Centre for Legal Aid, Voices in Bulgaria
Библиофем (Bibliofem)
Association on Refugees and Migrants in Bulgaria
Sea-Watch e.V.
Europe Cares
Hope and Humanity Poland
Project ELPIDA
Mobile Info Team
Africa Working Group IRF Roundtable Washington DC
Bitter Winter Magazine
Human Rights Without Frontiers
Samos Volunteers
Be Aware and Share
Network Anthropia
InterEuropean Humanitarian Aid Association
We Are Here
SolidariTee
Set My People Free (Sweden)
Solidarity With Migrants
Voice For Justice
Legalise Apostasy
United Macedonian Diaspora
Aria Razfar, Professor of Linguistics & Education, University of Illinois Chicago
Abdullah Hashem, The Ahmadi Religion of Peace and Light