

Alda calls for immediate reform on the issues of refugees and people seeking asylum

Alda – association for sustainability and democracy, has after much research, discourse and collaborative work on the issues of refugees and people seeking asylum, concluded that immediate reform is needed in regard to regulations and procedure.

According to article 14 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, everyone has the right to seek and enjoy asylum from persecution. Human rights violations take place in Iceland concealed beneath layers of bureaucracy. This must change.

Alda calls for the following reform to be carried out within the next six months:

- That refugees and people seeking asylum not be arrested, charged and criminalized upon arrival. Seeking asylum is not a crime, yet all people seeking asylum are imprisoned upon arrival in Iceland. There is no justification for this procedure and amnesty should be given immediately to those who have already been criminalized by this process.
- Refugees and people seeking asylum should not be detained or prosecuted for possessing false documents upon arrival. It goes against UN regulations for refugees as laid out in article 31 of the International Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. It is perfectly reasonable that people fleeing, e.g. from persecution of authorities, carry illegal travel documents. Demands for such legal document are unreasonable.
- People seeking asylum must be provided legal representation by a lawyer of their choice, with adequate experience and/or specialization in the issues of refugees and people seeking asylum.
- No proceedings, interrogations or mediation of important information should be held or given without a provided interpreter present. Translation should always be in the appropriate native language.
- People Seeking Asylum should be allowed to work. The right to work is a basic human right as per article 23 of the universal declaration of human rights. So is the right to join a labour union.

- Deportations based on the Dublin Regulation should cease immediately. This procedure funnels asylum seekers in Europe to the EU border states through which most asylum seekers enter the EU. Those states have a limited capacity to provide for the number of asylum seekers they are confronted with and thus most are turned away.
- The time allowed for reviewing an application for asylum must be limited to a few months and resources made available if acceptable time limits can not be met. The process must also be open and transparent. Transparency is essential for the sake of accountability. In current conditions people seeking asylum face uncertainty for months or years on end while their fate is being decided behind closed doors.
- If an application for asylum is rejected, the rejection should be supported by a report detailing the reasons why. This report should be published three months before the deportation.
- If an application for asylum is still being reviewed after 6 months asylum should immediately be granted on humanitarian grounds.
- People seeking asylum must be guaranteed access to basic social services such as healthcare, education, libraries, sporting facilities, public activities etc. equal to Icelandic citizens. At present many people seeking asylum suffer from social isolation and deprivation of basic means for inclusion and participation in society. Various mental and health related issues have a strong correlation with such isolation.
- People seeking asylum should be given adequate accommodation while waiting for the application process to be completed. Those accommodations should be located in Reykjavík rather than Reykjanesbær and all basic services should be provided locally.
- Special consideration should be given to the children of people seeking asylum. According to the UN Declaration of the Rights of the Child, every child without exception is entitled to social services and education and the child should in all circumstances be the first to receive protection and relief.
- All regulations regarding the issues of refugees and people seeking asylum

should aim to make the wait for asylum as short and easy as possible. The system should be constructed in a positive manner and aim to help people.

Detailed discussion:

War, poverty, persecution and other calamities that force people to flee their homes are often the result of economic and social processes based upon inequality and undemocratic government. Exploitation of the third world on behalf of western states has had a significant influence. Iceland has benefited from this order but refuses to shoulder the responsibility for the consequences by admitting the victims of this system into the country. While resources and capital are allowed to move around the globe without limits so should human beings.

Fundamental problems result from the organization of the world into nation-states. Minorities and individuals who do not belong to the "nation" become stateless and have thereby no access to a political community. Human rights are supposedly inalienable but in reality unequally distributed and many are denied such rights and other basic rights by affluent societies. The obligation to guarantee human rights falls on nation-states. Being stateless is thus to be alienated from even the most basic human rights.

Some of these issues cannot be solved fully by the Icelandic state alone but must be dealt with by the global community. Icelandic authorities should lend their weight to solving the issues facing immigrants and asylum seekers around the world.