

Germany: Protests against the deportation of refugees

Our correspondents
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Refugees from Afghanistan were herded onto a plane December 6 and flown from the German airport in Frankfurt-Main to Kabul. Several hundred demonstrators had assembled at the airport to protest against people being deported back to a war zone.

The protesters numbering over 800 demanded a right to remain for all. “No border, no nation! Stop deportation!” echoed throughout Terminal 1 of the airport, followed by: “Say it loud, say it clear: refugees are welcome here!”

A few hours earlier, the German Interior Minister Thomas de Maizière (CDU) declared the government was sticking to its policy of deportations to Afghanistan. The German government has been organising these inhumane deportations for one year. Since December 2016, Germany has deported 128 men to Afghanistan in seven separate actions. Another deportation flight to Pakistan was scheduled for the same day and the government is now even permitting deportations to Syria.

Responsibility for the deportations from Frankfurt lies with the government of the state of Hesse, a coalition of parties which includes the Greens. A large banner with the text: “The Greens in Hesse are deporting” was carried through the airport hall.

Sarmina Stuman from the Afghan Refugee Movement had issued the appeal for the demonstration. “We have been protesting against these deportations for a year now. Deportation to Afghanistan means deportation to death,” she said, pointing out that even Kabul Airport was bombed recently. “The US Army is increasing its troop numbers, and the German army has been involved in the war for over 15 years.”

The US alone dropped an average of eleven bombs a day in Afghanistan from January to September this year. “That’s a total of 3,238 bombs in just nine

months, not to mention dropping the MOAB, the largest non-nuclear bomb ever,” Sarmina said. “Does this sound like a peace mission?” This does not even include the bombs of other armies, nor the “attacks, kidnappings, killings, beheadings, etc., etc...”

At present deportations are limited to alleged “criminal offenders” and “perpetrators” and people who refuse to reveal their identity. Such criminal offences, however, could include riding public transport without a ticket or leaving the region assigned to refugees. “In addition, there are always people on the plane who are guilty of nothing,” declared Sina Mierendorf of Noborder Frankfurt.

To applause, Ramin Mohabat told demonstrators: “The lives of people who have committed crimes are also worth protecting. Why do you have to deport them to Afghanistan? It’s been at war for 16 years.” He reports that an acquaintance of his, who had returned from Europe, was dragged off a bus and beheaded by Taliban fighters on his way from Kabul to Herat because he had no beard and wore western clothes.

Ramin is a journalist and had brought along a great deal of material about the conditions in Afghanistan, but, he said the deportation authorities were not interested. He himself had also received notice of deportation. “All young refugees from Afghanistan are now getting deportation orders,” Ramin said. He was only able to resist his order “through a public campaign.”

The loud demonstration continued to crisscross the airport. Many protesters bore hand-written posters with slogans highlighting the absurdity of the situation, such as, “Afghanistan is safe, and the earth is flat.”

Not many travelers responded. One younger man, sitting on several suitcases, looked interested and said, “I’m on your side. The deportations are wrong.”

Others were told in English what was taking place.

A number of pilots stop to observe the demonstration. According to the WDR radio and television station, many pilots have refused to carry out deportation flights. Up until September there were 222 cases of pilots refusing to deport refugees.

The demonstration made a number of stops and short reports were given by young Afghans via microphone confirming what Ramin said: “At the moment, young men seem to be receiving indiscriminate deportation orders.”

An 18-year-old reported that he had been living in Hesse for two years, had found work and taken both language and driving lessons. “Two months ago I received a letter stating my application to stay had been rejected,” he said. His world had collapsed.

Hassan, another speaker, says he was able to first receive schooling in Germany. “It was only here that I got a future. If I am deported to Afghanistan it is a totally foreign country for me.”

Jeremias, a monk representing the Bavarian Refugee Council, grabbed the microphone. The Bavarian Interior Minister Joachim Hermann (CSU) has accused the Refugee Council of advising refugees to go underground. On its web site, the Council states that it “strictly rejects deportations to Afghanistan and considers its task to be to warn and advise affected refugees against deportation.”

Jeremias talks about a young man, an Afghan from Bayreuth, who was summoned at nine in the morning to the Central Immigration Office. He was arrested immediately to be deported the same night. He was neither a criminal or a “danger.” He was not even allowed to take with him documents to which he was entitled.

Jeremias also told of a Syrian family that was not deported solely because a Hungarian pilot refused to take them. According to the family, police arrived at dawn, at six o’clock, to pick them up.

All this, Jeremias stated, reminded him of the Third Reich. “What happened to the Jews back then? They were picked up early in the morning.” He did not want to make exaggerated comparisons, but: “It was said back then something like that should never happen again. And yet it is happening again today. Responsibility lies with all the governing parties, including those with Christian in their titles.”

When a handful of Young Socialists (jusos) commenced unrolling the flag of the Social Democratic Party youth organisation, one of the protest organisers approached and asked them, with assenting comments from those around, to roll up their banner because it “belongs to a party that organises the deportations.”

Mareike, with family and friends, carried a sign she wrote: “Nobody has the right to obey when it comes to inhumane deportations!” She told us she was participating in a demonstration against deportations for the fourth time.

“It is a shame that people living among us must fear deportation at any time.” She was worried about the growing moves towards militarisation, German army missions abroad, the corrupt EU and government policy in Africa. “I think the violence used abroad always reinforces internal violence. We can not isolate ourselves from that,” she says. “We have a responsibility. Some let refugees freeze to death in misery on the borders and others drown in the Mediterranean. They pay other governments to lock up people and sell them to slave traders. This is our so-called asylum system.”

“No normal person profits from any of this,” Mareike continued. “The only ones who benefit are the security industry and right-wing politicians.” That has to change, she emphasised. She demanded: “We have to dissolve the artificial borders that separate us from other people—whether that refers to nationality or residency status. All people have the same right to a self-determined, dignified life, to education, health and participation in society. Therefore, every deportation is one deportation too many.”



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