**AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL**

**PRESS RELEASE**

**Greece: Lives at risk as migrants and refugees are pushed back to Turkey**

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**(Brussels, 9 July 2013)** Refugees and migrants trying to reach the EU via Greece from conflict-torn countries like Syria and Afghanistan are being unlawfully returned to Turkey by Greek coast and border guards. In a new report, *Frontier Europe: Human Rights Abuses on Greece’s border with Turkey,* Amnesty International reveals the Greek authorities’ dangerous use of ‘push-backs’ - when they turn groups of migrants back across the border, denying them the right to have their individual cases heard or to challenge their expulsion.

“*These stories of push-backs are extremely alarming*,” said Nicolas Beger, Director of Amnesty International’s European Institutions office. “*Our research indicates that the Greek authorities are regularly returning people, blatantly ignoring their obligations under international and EU law and endangering people’s lives.”*

Since March, Amnesty International has spoken to nearly 30 people in Greece and Turkey who, in at least 39 separate instances, reported having been stopped trying to cross the Aegean Sea or the northern land border along the river Evros. The accounts cover the period from August 2012 to May 2013 which amounts to an average of one push-back a week, suggesting a worryingly widespread practice.

The case of B, a 17 year old boy who escaped from Afghanistan with his younger siblings, is just one example. B attempted to travel from Turkey to Greece by boat with his family, but was caught and beaten by the Greek coast guard. The coast guard then damaged the migrants’ boat, removing the motor and leaving all 42 people, including children, adrift at sea. They were eventually rescued by the Turkish coast guard.

*“Other EU countries appear only too happy for Greece to act as their gatekeeper. But they turn a blind eye to the policies and practices used to keep people out. Even in these difficult times for Greece and millions across Europe, there is no excuse for what is happening at the Greek borders. The EU must act now to stop these human rights violations happening on its doorstep,”* said Beger.

The route across the Aegean has become more popular in the last year after a fence was built along the Evros land border. But this is a perilous journey. Since August 2012 more than 100 people, including women and children, have drowned trying to reach Greece.

Amnesty International is calling on the Greek authorities to stop push-backs immediately, investigate allegations of collective expulsions and ill-treatment and prosecute those involved. The organisation is also urging the EU to support Greece in improving reception services instead of sealing off borders. Amnesty International maintains that the EU should explore new ways of sharing responsibility for refugees and migrants.

Interviews available in English, Greek, Turkish, Arabic, French and German.

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