**Israel's major writers call on Netaniahu to stop the deportation of refugees:**

Knesset Members, Govt. of Israel and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu,

We call on you to stop the deportation of asylum seekers from Eritrea and Sudan, men and women who have been horribly scarred in body and spirit in the course of their escape and who underwent torture in the Sinai desert, children who were born in Israel – all are asking only one thing: **to** **live.**

Unlike the massive wave of refugees in the West and the African continent, the number of asylum seekers in Israel constitutes **less than half of a percent of the population**, and since 2012 Israel has closed its gates to accepting more. **Israel does not have a refugee problem** nor is there any financial impediment to absorbing and resettling them, rather there are industries desperate for working hands in caretaking, agriculture and construction. An estimated 100,000 foreign citizens currently reside in Israel without legal permits, most of them of Eastern European origin; they are not persecuted nor are they a target for forcible deportation. Rather, the government of Israel has targeted the 35,500 African asylum seekers – people fleeing from conflict zones who are most in need of protection – for persecution and expulsion.

The argument put forth by the state is that these people are not asylum seekers, however not only has this never been verified, it is entirely unfounded due to the fact that Israel plans to deport them to a “third country” which will be compensated for taking them in, rather than returning them to the countries from which they fled, where **it has been proven that they will face torture and execution**. Moreover, Rwanda and Uganda, mentioned as “third countries” have stated that they have no such agreements with Israel. Where will the planes deposit the deportees, without rights or protection, and to whom has the state of Israel sold their lives?

The enormous sums that have been invested in the “Holot” and “Saharonim” prisons and detention centers, as well as the funds now allocated for deportation – billions of NIS – would be better spent absorbing refugees rather than persecuting them, profiting both morally and economically.

Unfortunately, the courts have sanctioned the deportation based on the guarantees the state is willing to provide for their safety. But it’s important to bear in mind that in 2012 the courts also allowed South Sudanese refugees to be deported and they were returned to their country based on similar guarantees. Many of the deportees, especially children and babies have **lost their lives in appalling circumstances due to this ruling, while others are now caught in an inferno of war, torture, rape, forced labor and human trafficking**. Their blood is on our hands, and it is our duty not to allow the tens of thousands of asylum seekers that live among us to suffer a similar fate. Not just for them – for us, so that we shall be able to live with ourselves as human beings, as people of the biblical verse: *Love ye therefore the stranger, for ye were strangers*. Our history as a people is turning in the grave that is now being dug. Jews cannot persecute and expel refugees, the State of Israel cannot cause this humanitarian disaster and **you have the privilege to prevent it**.

As stated by the principal of the Bialik-Rogozin school, home to many children of the asylum seekers, this is the moral standard that the State of Israel and its citizens expect, the standard we are obligated to uphold. Jewish and human morality have presented us with a historical commitment; failure to meet it would be regretted for generations to come.

The forced deportation of asylum seekers is scheduled to take place before *Yom Ha’Shoa*, Holocaust Remembrance Day. We call on you to act with the morality, decency and compassion befitting the Jewish people and stop the deportation, prevent the refugees from going back to the hell they have escaped. Otherwise there will be no revival for the Jewish homeland.

1. David Grossman, Man Booker Prize laureate
2. Amos Oz, Israel Prize Recipient
3. A.B. Yehoshua, Israel Prize Recipient
4. Prof. Shimon Zandbank, Israel Prize Recipient
5. Tuvia Rivner, Israel Prize Recipient
6. Sami Michael
7. Tal Nitzan
8. Lea Aini
9. Meir Shalev
10. Savyon Liebrecht
11. Yehoshua Sobol
12. Zeruya Shalev
13. Raquel Chalfi
14. Prof. Nissim Kalderon
15. Orly Castel-Bloom
16. Yehudit Katzir
17. Esty G. Haim
18. Yuval Shimoni
19. Etgar Keret
20. Dr. Michal Ben-Naftali
21. Noa Yadlin
22. Prof. Eilat Shamir
23. Alona Kimhi
24. Dov Alfon
25. Prof. Menachem Perri
26. Agi Mishol
27. Dr. Ilana Hammerman
28. Edna Mazya
29. Yossi Sucary
30. Prof. Abraham Oz
31. Amira Hess
32. Nurit Zarchi
33. Yishai Sarid
34. Shimon Adaf
35. Yaara Shchori
36. Ilana Bernstein
37. Shimon Buzaglo
38. Dana Amir
39. Iris Eliya Cohen
40. Dory Manor

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