

## **Fears government plans to forcibly remove Afghan children sets a dangerous precedent**

Despite government claims that the UK immigration system would be the “most child-friendly” in the world [1], members of the Young People Seeking Safety network [2] are gravely concerned by government proposals under ERPUM [3] to forcibly remove 16 and 17 year olds to Afghanistan.

Lisa Matthews of the NCADC said “Plans to remove Afghan children are a frightening development which threatens the safety of many already deeply distressed young people. If these proposals go ahead, unaccompanied young Afghans will face forced removal, despite their age and vulnerability, and regardless of their social and emotional needs, or their often devastating early experiences. Many of these young people have already entirely lost, or lost contact with, their homes and families and have endured terrifying journeys into Europe. Now they are threatened with the secondary loss of their rebuilt lives, newly formed relationships, and hopes for safety in the UK.”

Alex Sutton of Praxis said “The ERPUM proposals set a dangerous precedent of removing children to war zones. This appears to be a way for the government to bypass their obligations to provide protection. Removing these young people will not deter people from fleeing Afghanistan and coming to the UK, as those who leave do so because of very real threats to their lives in their home country.”

Saaed [4] who fled to the UK from Afghanistan when he was 14 years old, said of his experiences: “It took me around 7 months before I arrived in the UK and I went through hell during my journey. I had to walk for...days and nights...without any proper food. Once I was in a box for 53 hours, without any food or air...when everyone got off the truck they found me unconscious... I have been through very hard times and all these experiences and pressures have really affected me....now I have established a life here. If I was returned back, this could be unbearable.”

UNHCR figures confirm that Afghanistan is becoming more dangerous, and more children are being killed. The plans for removal will simply push these children in need of protection underground, uncounted and unsupported.

The Afghan government has raised doubts about the possibility of successfully tracing family members, a key element on which the return scheme is meant to rely. A number of international organisations have expressed their concerns about child protection, and that the safety of Afghan children removed to reception centres in Kabul cannot be guaranteed.

Members of the YPSS network share these concerns, and call on the UK government to withdraw from the treacherous European Return Platform for Unaccompanied Minors. We urge the UK to honour its commitment to respecting the rights of the child, and to prioritise the safety of children forced to flee their homes.

[1] <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-12005701>

[2] at [www.youngpeopleseekingsafety.co.uk](http://www.youngpeopleseekingsafety.co.uk)

[3] The European Return Platform for Unaccompanied Minors

[http://www.migrationsverket.se/info/4597\\_en.html](http://www.migrationsverket.se/info/4597_en.html)

[4] Saaed's story <http://www.youngpeopleseekingsafety.co.uk/stories/saaed>

[5] Blanche Tax of UNHCR speaking to The Observer

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/jan/29/out-afghanistan-boys-stories-europe>

*For more information about YPSS, contact [lisa@ncadc.org.uk](mailto:lisa@ncadc.org.uk) or [alex.sutton@praxis.org.uk](mailto:alex.sutton@praxis.org.uk). YPSS can also be found on Facebook, Twitter and at [www.youngpeopleseekingsafety.co.uk](http://www.youngpeopleseekingsafety.co.uk)*

ENDS