

## **greetings from sweden**

To our friends from noborder

Between November 15 2005 and march 30 2006 something unique happened in Sweden. Tens of thousands of hidden and waiting refugees could, without fear, go to the Migration Board and hand in their papers for a re-trial due to a new temporary amnesty legislation.

No deportation were being made during this short period of time. The detention centers were empty and the civil servants had nothing to do. This was a short period of "seize fire" in the middle of the invisible war on asylum seekers.

In the year 2005 the number of hidden refugees were between 10 000 and 20 000. This was a result of a very severe refugee politics during a long period of time. Sweden does not tolerate people without papers and they have no rights whatsoever. Organisations of volunteers just could not take care of so many people, not to mention help them with food, a place to stay and medicine.

The humanitarian engagement in refugee lives was transformed to political energy and organised political struggle. Grassroot workers, people from older NGO:s, established institutions and political parties gathered around one single demand: Papers for all hidden and waiting refugees.

In January 2005 a campaign network called "Amnesty for refugees 2005" was created. They demand a general amnesty for all asylum seekers in Sweden. People in Sweden started to question the basic values of their society as well as their own picture in it.

The major part of the media helped to spreading the stories that asylum seekers told about their lives. The myth cracked and critical voices raised. Today, there is a more friendly atmosphere towards the refugees in Sweden.

In Sweden, the asylum seeker have the right to choose in which city they want to live. In spite of the fact that they will not receive any economical contribution for the rent but most of them drop to stay in the refugee camps and choose instead the big cities for living. In this way they are less isolated and have a lot easier to meet and to organize their activities.

By and by the asylum seekers broke their silence and took part in discussions, meetings and other activities. Many people spread leaflets in the streets and the areas they lived. They took part in formulating and writing their own demands as well as they participated in the practical works. Asylum seekers took an active part in the public domain. Cultural workers, musicians and artists helped

by telling the asylum seekers' stories and lives in documentaries, songs and films. Many journalists and scientists wanted to meet the hidden refugees face to face. The protest helped to raise sympathy and understanding for the refugees' situation in society.

In September 14 2005, 134 members of the parliament voted for an amnesty, but 172 were against. The against group were exclusively Social Democrats and Moderates (a Right wing party). After the no to amnesty in the Parliament the Social Democrats in the government was forced by their two smaller collaborate parties (Vansterpartiet and Miljopartiet - the Left and the Green Party) to make a temporary law granting residence permits for families with children and the asylum applicants that could not be sent away. According to the Migration Board only around 50 % of all the asylum seekers got or will get residence permits.

Today there are lots of refusals and people are starting to hide again. The invisible war is on -again. Different groups of asylum seekers who are denied the permission of residence gathers in spontaneous actions or goes on hunger strikes out of pure desperation.

Some of us who are writing this letter are asylum seekers and have worked actively in the campaign. We are expecting decisions from the Migration Board and we don't know how our lives will look like if we forced to hide again. It is very important to tell the asylum seekers that not all campaigns are successful, that we have to be prepared for failures. That just a campain is succesful dose not mean that it will change the asylum policy radically. At its best, it should be seen as a very important but temporary improvement.

When the Swedish parliament voted no to amnesty we had no strategy on how to continue our work. Some local groups had no activities since the decision and some held out untill the end of the campaign, March 31, for as many people as possible could to stay. After the temporary gained legality many asylum seekers have became engaged solely in their own cases.

For us the campaign had one clear goal: To help asylum seekers gain a permit of residency. To reach that goal we had no other choice but to work inside the legal framework. Only the authorities can give such permission in the end and we worked to get as good results as possible that as many people as possible could to live in dignity. The methods we have used was not always the ones we loved the most. We protested and showed our anger upon many issues but we carefully discussed every action for not closing the door on a dialogue with the politicians.

At the same time we who work for concrete results we ought to have a discussion about "Borders", how they affect life even for "legal citizens" and the way we

can act in public domain. Borders do not protect us from refugees, but transform our society to a prison.

To succeed in campaigns by making refugees legal we have to mobilise many people with good arguments, creativity and patience.

Today in Sweden some people have begin to organise and to work for obtaining papers for everybody. New networks must be created and they have to collaborate with organisations from other European countries for stoping the EU:s common and hostile refugee conventions and try to replace them with rules based on justice and solidarity.

Some of us pay a high price for their civildisobedience by crossing the borders without permission of states. But we consider our struggle for papper /legal status as a part of a bigger sruggle for justice for everybody.

With best regards,  
Farzin, Flyktingamnesti  
Shahed, Flyktingamnesti  
aida, No one is illegal

**Here's a list of things we did during the campaign:**

In Januari 2005 a campaign network called "Amnesty for Refugees 2005" was created.

In the spring of 2005 around 160000 signatures were gathered for the "Easter Petition" Initiated by the Swedish Council of Churches, K.G Hammar which formulated a demand for a humanitarian asylum policy.

In the same period all the parties in the Swedish parliament, except for the Social Democrats and the Conservative party, submitted a joint motion for a review of all asylum claims which had been refused by the Aliens Appeals Board.

In total more than 100 000 persons were active at meetings, in writing letters and postcards to politicians, handing out flyers and information sheets and expressing their opinion at manifestations.

During spring and summer 2005 a tabloid paper printed especially on this issue with an edition of 250000 was distributed. Ten thousands of pamphlets and posters in different languages were printed and spread.

In May and September 2005 coordinated demonstrations were held in 30 places throughout the country.

The popular musicians recorded a CD together called "For those who we send back", to be sold for the benefit of the campaign.

> \* Candle manifestations was held in different cities  
> in December. The manifestations were held to support  
> the asylum seekers that haven't been included in the  
> temporary law and therefore risk to be deported. The  
> protesters claimed for residence permits for all  
> refugees in  
> Sweden and redress for all the people that have been  
> humiliated by the unjust Swedish asylum process. The  
> manifestation also demanded more human and generous  
> refugee laws.  
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> \* In december 2005 the campaign "Amnesty for refugees  
> 2005" have through the Gothenburg division sent  
> letters to all of the administrators of the migration  
> service agency that handle the temporary law. This  
> have been done at to occasions, the later one as a  
> Christmas greeting together with an article collection  
> as a christmas gift reminding them about their big  
> responsibility.  
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> \* The campaign "Flyktingamnesti 2005" went into its  
> final phase in mars 2006 when the Aliens Appeals Board  
> was replaced by migration courts. On the 29 th of mars  
> the campaign held a manifestation outside the  
> parliament during the main debate about migration  
> policies. From midday there was a quiet protest to  
> show solidarity with all the people that still are  
> waiting for permits, or living hidden because of they  
> have been rejected resident permits.  
>  
> \* A folder in the shape of a passport was handed out  
> by the campaign. The passport contained of stories  
> from asylum seekers that have got their permits thanks  
> to the temporary law, from persons that once again  
> have been refused to stay in Sweden and stories from  
> persons that still are waiting for the verdict whether  
> they will be able to stay or if they will be send back  
> to lives and countries they've struggled hard to leave  
> behind.  
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